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THE LOVE CHILD

THE LOVE CHILD

BY

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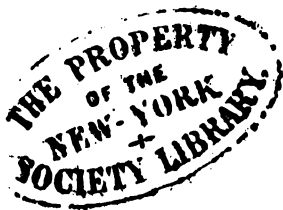
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THE LOVE CHILD



THE LOVE CHILD

CHAPTER I

JOSEPH, like his scriptural namesake, had many brethren ; and his mother was a widow and a laundress. These family details may account for his occupancy of the cane-bottomed chair in the draughty passage that led to the chambers in Lamb's Court, tenanted principally by junior members of the Bar. It was understood in the home circle that this younger member of the family spent laborious hours in the study of shorthand ; but though a soiled and dog-eared exercise book on the little table at which he sat gave a show of truth to the fiction, it was in reality but an artful cover for a copy of one of those penny serials which tell of adventure by flood and field, of submarine monsters, air-ships, and wonderful contrivances, surpassing all human understanding of mechanical law. As to Joseph, he was indifferent to all law, human or divine—provided the hero continued to pursue his adventures through many chapters of incident. Add to these delights a meditative chew at an apple, or a long-drawn suck at a slab of butter-scotch, and Joseph had his glimpse of Paradise. This morning he had been temporarily recalled to the duties of life by the arrival of the mail. It was a bulky mail, consequent upon an English delivery, and occasioned a contemptuous snigger as he picked out a number of letters addressed to the latest of his many masters.

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"Vaughan, Temple, Vaughan, Vaughan, Vaughan, Vaughan, Temple, Vaughan. Lor! Mar, Maryanne, Charlotta, little Susie, and the bloomin' baby. 'Ain't the snakes bit him?' or the 'skeeters swelled his head?' or 'ain't he got sunstroke?' 'Hope he ain't took to drink, an' sez his prayers reg'lar!' 'Ow's his poor feet?'—Oh lor! as though we ain't got enough of our own coves lookin' fer billets without having these chaps shoved on us! Though"—and here a feeble sense of judicial impartiality tempered his democratic utterance—"they ain't bad bosses as bosses go."

Then he strolled leisurely along the corridor, and up the wooden staircase whose grime was tempered by occasional dustings, delivering the letters. On the top floor he knocked at the door of a room, bearing the names of—

MR. TEMPLE,
MR. VAUGHAN,

and opening it in response to a sharp "Come in," was saluted by the odour of recent tobacco smoke, and two seriously composed faces bent over a litter of legal papers.

"Ah me! lack-a-day me!" sighed Vaughan, reaching for the concealed pipe, "it is only Joseph—Joseph in the fulness of youth, in rampant innocence before the charms—What, boy! English letters?"

"Yessir, mail's a day ahead of time."

Temple received his two, and Vaughan his many.

"Newspapers, sir."

"Mater, the girls, and Susannah," commented Vaughan as he perused the addresses; "absurd name, 'Susannah.' Parents can't be too careful how they name their little ones, Temple. Many a man or woman is damned at the baptismal font—nor could a heavenly host of godparents save them from their fate."

...

Temple had already digested the contents of his two letters, but Vaughan dallied with his, daintily cutting the envelopes with a penknife.

"Like Joseph, I take my sweetness long drawn out. There is the joy of surprise of the one part, and the fear of anticipation of the other part. Had I the pen of a dainty essayist, Temple, I could write a charming composition on 'The Emotions of one who may be about to receive a Remittance on the opening of a Letter from an Absent Parent.' As a prelude, I would refer to the awakening joy of spring, the twittering of birds——"

"Oh! confound your chatter! Read the letters and be done with them!"

"You're the most prosaic beggar I ever met, not enough poetry in your composition to write a—a——"

"Oh! call it a cheque!"

"My dear fellow, there's a deal of poetry in a generous cheque. Nothing goes home to the emotions like it. Any news?"

"No; the old story, flat, stale and unprofitable—land played out. The Pater contemplates going in for some kind of glorified milk-walk.

"Buy Temple's peptonised milk for the multitude! No more microbes; salutary, soothing, and satisfying. Packed in patent bottles to suit infantile requirements! Ho, all ye infants that are athirst, come drink of Temple's motherised milk! That's what we're coming to, eh?" And Vaughan chuckled; then gave himself to the deliberate perusal of his packet. Being sons of neighbouring landholders in Kent, they had a circle of acquaintances in common, so that it became a matter of course, on the receipt of the English mail, to exchange such news, gossip, and messages as the letters might contain.

"Anything new your way?" asked Temple as he watched Vaughan put away the last of his letters.

"Aunt Fan—the poor old dear, with a heart too large for her pocket—devotes two pages to the mural decorations of a new church at Swallow-super-mare, a page to the domestic arrangements of her fowl-house, and the rest to most excellent advice founded on a sermon by the Vicar. The Pater discourses sweetly on the parlous state of politics, touches upon the increased income-tax, enlarges upon the badness of the times, and concludes with paternal injunctions and his blessing. Then Susannah takes up the tale. She's also a dear old girl, and was born to be a boon and a blessing to some man who may be prepared to place his life in her keeping. She certainly would remould it to her heart's desire, if not to his complete content. Her favourite idea is that woman should be a sort of petticoated apostle to fallen man. But she's a dear old girl for all that. Her mother married into a jam factory and pickle emporium, on the larger scale, consequently Susannah, being an only child, is rich beyond the dreams of avarice. As a benevolent despot, I admire her immensely; as a wife (and that was the family arrangement), well, I felt that I was unworthy of her, and after a brief engagement of three days, devoted to much soul-searching on the gravity and responsibilities of the married state, varied by a few chaste demonstrations of affection on the lower plane of everyday humanity, we terminated our engagement, and I departed—to 'carve out a career,' as Susannah put it; and here I am; but alas! the bird is tough and the knife is blunt."

"Well, Vaughan, if you take my advice you will seek it elsewhere than at the Bar. It's not your trade, old man."

"Humph! that's candid! But honestly I believe you

are right. After all, I am the son of folk who have lived—I apologise to them, have starved—on the land for generation after generation, and have increased and multiplied beyond all keeping on the paternal acres. So Bob is struggling with Army exams.; Cyril, poor old boy, is a Curate surpassing dull on forty pounds or thereabout a year, and I have been called to the Bar. I forget the old Benchers who did it, but I shall owe him a grudge to the end of my days. Temple, I break the tenth commandment every day of my life, for I covet my neighbour's ox and his ass (if there are any specimens of that humble beast in this part of the world) with a mighty covetousness. Why, man, to me there is more joy in one clean-limbed up-standing horse with a strain of decent blood in him, than in ninety and nine just Bills of Costs passed for taxation. Let the robe give way to the land, say I! My God! man," and Vaughan stumped the room excitedly; "to think of living day after day in this dusty hole, with the country in your eyes and your ears, and buzzing through your brain; with the sun mocking you, when the poor devil manages to peep at an odd corner, and the morning air fresh as a young colt laughing at you, as you turn into this confounded box like a caged fly!"

"They usually give us the rôle of spider," interjected Temple.

"Well, spider or fly, whichever it is, I detest it; a seat on a saddle suits me better than any legal woolsack in remote prospect, and what's more, I mean to have it! Look you, Temple, I mean to have it! I'm the sort of man after Horace Greeley's heart, for I mean to go West"

"Oh, there's lots of fun to be had out West in this country. It would have been interesting to try Greeley on it. You mark my words, you'll yearn after Susannah and the jam factory as never man yearned, before you are

done with it. Still, honestly, I don't think you are cut out for law, so try the land, and good luck go with you. Suppose you consult Sheldon. He knows more about the country than we do—how many sheep go to an acre, or acres go to a sheep."

"Very well! let us consult the oracle."

They crossed the passage and knocked at a door bearing the name of

DR. SHELDON.

"Oh! come in, come in! Sure I wish I had as many visits from the rogues of solicitors as I have from you two youngsters. I hope it's something easy you have to ask this time, just a trifle of criminal jurisprudence—say a dissertation on McNaughten's case. Bedad, it's one of the few cases I trouble my head about in these degenerate days. You see the man McNaughten——"

"Oh! never mind McNaughten! we have come to you as an authority on the land, Sheldon," said Temple.

"The land, is it? Oh, there you are," pointing to a shelf on which a set of the sessional parts of the Statutes were grouped. "You'll find out all about it, scattered through those precious volumes like buttercups in a meadow. And when you've picked it all out, I'd advise you to take a Turkish bath and collect your ideas. Sure! those same laws are a gold-mine of litigation to two enterprising boys like you!"

"Oh! it isn't the law that Vaughan wants. It's advice generally. 'Counsel will advise generally' on the prospects of an active and energetic new chum carving a career out of the land."

"Carve a career! Carve a grave you mean! Sure that's the best advice I can give you. Once upon a time, as they say in fairy books—and here's a bit of family

history for you—a decent Irish farmer, his wife and children, landed in this country, which, if you believed the Saxon newspapers—God save the mark!—overflowed with milk and honey; and went upon the land. May the devil pursue me, if ever I forget the days of my youth on that precious land! Sure Moses never tormented the Egyptians with more plagues, divers and sundry indeed; when there wasn't a drought there was a flood; the 'improvements,' as they called the bit of fencing, were licked up by a fire in the twinkling of an eye; when the rabbits didn't eat the crops, sure the locusts gave them a turn; the cows took mysterious diseases—pleura and the like—which an honest Kerry cow would scorn to be seen with; every burr in the place lodged in the wool and made itself at home there; the ewes got bogged in the dam, and the rams wandered disconsolate with their eyes bunged up. Was there ever such a country! The old man, my father, struggled like Hercules, and laboured like a mountain, only to give birth to a mortgage. Sorra anything else did he bring forth, poor soul! What was left after ten years of struggle against the forces of nature the storekeeper ate up. There was a Hebrew Jew introduced into the business about this time, and we went out almost naked, with the comfortable bit of money all gone. God forgive me! but I never eat rabbit pie without a lustful sense of revenge. The Almighty seems to forget this unfortunate country till an archangel jogs his elbow, as it may be of a morning, and says: 'They're a bit wet down there in Australia, and due for a drought'; or it may be we're a bit too dry, and we get a thumping flood. There's no going easy in this country at all; you're always in a crisis up to your neck. If it hadn't been for my mother's own brother who had taken to the police, and risen to the giddy heights of many terraces and suburban lots, and whose lamented but consoling departure restored

the fortunes of the Sheldons, we should have been 'humping our blueys' round the backblocks until the Day of Judgment. However, if the young man thinks he can better the experience, I'll drop a line to as decent a couple as walked this earth—old Peter Rowe and his wife. Peter was here in the 'forties, long before our illustrious family came to make its fortune. He has a tidy cattle station in the Hills, and, so far as I know, has weathered drought, flood, and the banks."

"I rather think that must be the man my father wrote to," said Vaughan, "but in the multitude of introductory letters leading to invitations to drink and an occasional dinner, I had overlooked him."

"His wife and daughter are coming to town in a few weeks. She's a kindly soul with a sympathetic heart for youngsters in distress—I beg your pardon, pioneers, who are seeking a career. Maybe she will remember your father's letter."

"Thanks, Doctor. You are a port in distress."

"Oh! that's all right! Sure I've been there myself, my boy. Now there's just a little matter of a friendly divorce that requires delicate handling, so that the court may perceive it in the right light, do——"

"Sorry if we have interrupted you."

"Not at all. But just before you go, Vaughan, my boy, if you remove the volume of Meeson and Welsby beyond there, you will find a flask—ah! that's it; just a drop of cordial you know to warm the cockles of a bereaved heart—thirty years a bachelor, not counting the days of my squandered youth—on the land. Och hone!"

CHAPTER II

FASSIFERN lies at the foot of the ranges. It is the last resting-place for the bullocks, before they drag the laden dray along the winding track that leads up and on till the ridge is reached. Then many a sweltering mile has to be travelled before a homestead comes in sight. The settlement—it could hardly be called a township—consisted of a few scattered houses, a school building—the architectural feature of the place—and a sly grog shanty, known for some traditionary reason as “The Magpie and Stump.” No general store had yet established itself in this outpost of civilisation, consequently all the stores for the cattle stations had to be brought from a distance of some twenty miles nearer the coast. It was an unlovely spot. In summer, red dust coated the fringe of struggling gums along the winding track that led to it; and the sun blazed on it till the galvanised iron roof of the school glittered in the distance with the delusive suggestion of a water-hole. The grass was always scant and dry; for if, by any little kindness of spring, a blade of green came up, it was speedily blasted by the scorching heat of summer. The keen winds from the snow-capped ranges in the winter discouraged any herbage that might follow on the rains. Beyond the settlement, however, the hills closed in and formed a sheltered valley. Here the timber was of greater girth, taller and sturdier, the scrub denser. Where a clearing had been made, there was a patch of green for dust-wearied eyes to gaze on gratefully. At the end of this gully the way upward began. Once a month, on the Sunday afternoon, service

was held in the school. By a friendly arrangement among the Protestants, the building was used by Anglicans, Wesleyans, and Presbyterians, as opportunity allowed ; but in the periodical muster of worshippers, the same faces were always seen. The Roman Catholics had a chapel elsewhere, at the site of what had once been a mining township, still marked by a few deserted shafts. The ever-shifting mining population had left it almost isolated. True to the colonial traditions of the Church, it stood on a hill-top, from which its sharp metallic bell rang out the call to prayer across many miles of surrounding country.

On this particular Sunday afternoon the Rev. Luke Fennel had conducted the service in the school at Fassifern. To accomplish this duty, the Rev. Luke had ridden many miles since morning service in a distant town. When he arrived, he gave his horse a drink and feed, unpacked a crumpled surplice from the valise strapped across the pommel of the saddle, and bundled into it without unnecessary delay, its short length failing to hide his dusty leggings. Then, followed by a string of worshippers, he entered the church, and plunged at once into "Dearly beloved brethren, the Scripture moveth us."

The Rev. Luke had ministered to the spiritual wants of squatter and "cocky" for some five years ; and his ministry ran on the broad lines that life and circumstance in this remote district had fostered in him. He was a simple man, with a simple creed ; the Bishop, too, was afar off. Father Dermot Sheldon and he had been fast friends since a day when the parson's hand clasped the priest's over poor Luke's life drama.

God only knows why the parson did it ; and perhaps He knows too why she did it. Fennel had been doing bush work for a couple of years when he took a holiday trip to Sydney. After the lapse of a month, he came back to his

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scattered charge, a not too well-conditioned nag pulling a buggy, that, if not advanced in age, was at least seasoned to the road. In the trap was a bright-eyed, merry-faced girl: pink and white she looked in her fresh print gown by the side of Fennel in his black coat topped with a sun-tanned face and soft black hat. Marvel of womanly influence! Luke's tie was dazzlingly white, and his coat had felt the brush! They had settled down in a rough weather-board cottage not far from the homestead. So began their married life. For a while the bright face smiled on a little world of kindly folk who sought her out. The wedding gifts and the humble outfit of the home came by the bullock-dray, and Luke, in the clean, sweet glory of those early married days, thought surely this was "Paradise enow." On Sunday they would rattle their bones over the rude stump-chequered tracks to one or other of the churches in the far-extended parish, and a note of sentiment crept into Fennel's sermons that had been absent from the prosaic discourses of old. Also a new voice, clear and musical, with a music that was not of the schools, led the hymns. Luke for a time so far forgot his ecclesiastical allegiance as to fall down and worship at the shrine of a woman. After a while the buggy was carefully sheltered under a bark-covered "lean-to," and the parson took the road once more on his nag, whom the little woman had one day, as he stopped to drink at the creek, solemnly christened "the Deacon," because, said she, he was full of years and stiff in the legs; thus possessing a maturity and dignity that fitly became the Deacon's office. Both parson and "Deacon" left home at a three-mile pace, and returned at a six during these days. Later on, an elderly dame of ample measurement was put down from the dray, with certain additional stores; and now the parson and "Deacon" left home at a one-mile pace, and returned

at an eight. Then a day came when the parson hesitated to go at all; but she shook her head, and drawing him down to her in the sunlit patch of the verandah where she sat, kissed the rough brown cheek, and whispered with a smile that had the mist of tears in it, "Not yet." And that day the parson and "Deacon" loafed about for half-an-hour before they made a start at all. The parson, for example, came back to say that the sunflowers which she had sown from some seeds her mother had sent her, from the old home in England, were thrusting their little, flat, round leaflets through the soil. She had a dream of home that day, and saw her mother's face. "Deacon" rubbed his nose against the gate-post and dissembled sleep, from which he could with difficulty be roused; and so, unwillingly, he and the parson turned their faces to the day's duties. Ah, at what a pace they came home that night! It was about sunset, and the air was just crisping with the evening freshness that comes with sundown in the hills. A few minutes more the darkness would fall, and he would watch for the twinkling lights of home. Just then, bearing down on them, they sighted the figure of Father Dermot. It was framed between the trees against the dusky red sky. Now Father Dermot had a laugh that made him beloved of men whose natures were not awry, and it generally heralded his coming far off. This evening he barred the way of the parson and "Deacon" silently.

"Fennel," said he.

Then the parson felt his heart thump and stop, and again thump and stop, the priest still barring the way.

"Fennel," said the father a second time with throaty indistinctness; "Fennel, my poor boy! My God! I can't tell ye—I can't." The round face twisted convulsively, and the old padre's voice broke into a harsh sob.

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Then Fennel swept past him, with a cry that Sheldon will remember till his last Mass is served.

Two days afterwards a straggling line of mourners wended its way down the track, cantering in a cloud of dust to the far-away cemetery. "Deacon" that day carried a light burden in the buggy; and Fennel swore, remembering the hands that had so often helped to harness him, that he should never carry burden more. He drove himself, and thus he and "Deacon" brought their dead to the burial-place. Death blotted out all theological differences between parson and priest, as the mother and child were laid to sleep in the peace of the one God.

That, however, belonged to the past. The afternoon had far advanced by the time the minister had reached the benediction, and during the short sermon some of the lads had slipped out, and started the billies going, for it was a custom to have tea after the service, when the women could exchange gossip; and the men, gathering in taciturn groups, smoked and exchanged staccato remarks on the price of stock, displayed local learning in the matter of cattle-brands, or denounced the latest land law. Some of the younger folk improved each other's acquaintance with intuitions of a distant mating time. Many a riding party was projected; many a dance put in train, to be persistently hinted to parents, with the usual result of a continued course of wearing. They were a fine type of womanhood, these young girls clad in habits, often home-made, with hats of straw or soft felt, their bodies straight and lissom as young saplings; their faces tanned by the sunlight that daily beat on them. The children of a sturdy race, to be themselves the mothers of sons, who would be the kings of pasture-lands, where the sheep could be numbered in their thousands—or of the hills where the stock-whip cracked, and the red-brown cattle mustered

in a lowing, tossing multitude. City-bred eyes, wearied with the type of daintily-clad women, slim-waisted, narrow-hipped, anæmic, dwelt thankfully upon the sight. It was something to thank God for that these hills held back the city life for a while, and let nature have her will in moulding the mothers of the race. The laughter from the groups rang out with the unrestrained freedom of unconventional life. The joy of living, one felt, had not yet been wholly vanquished.

Chief of one of the groups was a girl of about eighteen years; of more than average height, her body, shown through the tightly-fitting riding-habit, rounded in the full unrestrained curves that suggest untrammelled growth and abundant exercise; her figure straight, the trunk set firmly on the hips; her well-proportioned head poised on shoulders that had in their sweep a suggestion of masculine breadth. Her features were full; the forehead broad, with a rippled mass of dark hair drawn back from it, and knotted loosely at the nape of the neck. Her eyes were frank, fearless, and honest; her upper lip clear cut, the lower curved and the chin rounded.

The parson wandered from group to group, a cup or pannikin of tea here, a sandwich there, a cake elsewhere; making an ample meal out of the wholesome fare around him. He was a taciturn man; perhaps happiest when jogging along a track through the bush alone with his thoughts; though often waking from the "might-have-been" with many a sharp tug at his heart-strings. In the years of his life among them he had grown part of the hills; and if at rare intervals he took a holiday in the city, it was to return with a deep breath of thankfulness that he had done with the wearying pavements and the never-ending riot. The best in him had to be drawn out when the mood was favourable. Unsympathetic in manner, with a cold metallic

voice, and with strangers assuming a certain pedantry of speech, he was at heart a keenly sympathetic man—a fact that the mongrel pack of dogs, who lived at his expense, realised sooner than his parishioners; except indeed those who had had occasion to test the worth of the man. He generally started from home with a pack of curs at his heels, but they thinned out after a mile or so, till “Tatters” alone remained, a gaunt old kangaroo-dog, with one sound eye and a lurching limp. “Tatters” had earned his name. There was scarce an inch of his hide that had not at some time been lifted in combat. The degrees of surgical art exercised in sewing him up could be traced from nose to tail. “Tatters’” coat was almost as rucked and rusty as his master’s, and that was saying a good deal.

“I hear you are accompanying your mother and cousin to Sydney, Miss Rowe,” said the parson, when he had wandered round to the group of young folk.

“Yes, we leave this week.”

“Ah!” and Fennel groped through his mind for some conventional remark.

“Has your cousin been there before?”

“No; never nearer the city than the railway terminus at Goondaberg.”

“Indeed!—thanks, no sugar. You will—ah—you will find it very interesting. Never be able to settle down to this quiet life after all the gaiety, the shops, the theatres, that—ah—sort of life generally.”

“Oh! I don’t know about that! Poor old ‘Tatters’ been in any more scrapes lately? Any new patches?”

“Ah!” said Fennel, brightening up; “come here, old man. See this square, Miss Sheila? Wouldn’t know it from the rest of him, would you?”

“It has not quite healed yet, and it looks a little strange—something like a piece of ‘possum skin.”

"Just hit it! The old chap was out with that ruffian Yanakee—you know his hut beyond Corongillie? Well, they bailed up a magnificent 'old man.' Yanakee swears he was as white as silver—probably a lie. However, 'Tatters' had him by the throat, and the beast would have ripped up his—his—ahem!—ah, yes—ripped him up, if the wily dog had been young at the game. But there! you ought—or you ought not—to have heard Yanakee describe it. Quite Homeric! Grand fight! However, 'Tatters's' teeth are not what they were, and so the brute got away. Yanakee swears he stood impossible feet high, and white—yes, I told you about that. Well, poor old 'Tatters' as usual had his hair lifted, a piece flicked clean out. When he got home he was a sorry sight, and when I set to patch him the piece, of course, was missing. Now, you wouldn't call 'Tatters' handsome, but he is, or rather was, a whole dog, with no missing parts. So, not to destroy the symmetry of his picturesque design, I tried an experiment in skin-grafting. Shot a 'possum, skinned him, fitted a piece in the uncovered space, pressed it in fresh and warm, fixed it with a stitch or two—and there you are; quite an artistic job!"

"Oh, Mr. Fennel," suggested an interested young listener to the parson's unusually long monologue, "some day you may have him trying to climb a tree, or—if he had any tail worth speaking about—which he hasn't—trying to hang it on a sapling. Picture the feelings of an aged dog tormented with an uncontrollable desire to climb trees!"

This mental picture of "Tatters'" occupation in extreme age tickled the little group, ever ready to find occasion for a laugh.

Tea over, the congregation began to disperse; some on horseback, swinging off in the universal bush canter;

others hitching up traps of one kind and another—from the buggy to the spring-cart; and others making ready to depart in the drays to which the patient, drowsing bullocks had been hitched.

Very soon the shadows crept over the settlement, as the sun sank behind the trees, and presently the place was left to its few inhabitants. It would be hours before the Rowe family—father, mother, daughter, sons, and the fair-haired cousin—brimful of activity, chatter, and laughter, would reach their home. The old couple and a group of children from a neighbouring selection occupied the dray, on which an ample feather-bed had been deposited; and to this place of luxurious ease—tempered by the want of springs—"mother" had been conveyed by the aid of a staircase formed by a couple of boxes. She was an ample old body, with eyes filled with the brooding light of one who moves in a little atmosphere of mystery—where there is no mystery—to contrive the comfort and happiness of those about her. Mentally her horizon was perhaps a little limited. Her bible, her bairns, and her butter were the central facts of life to her. "Father's" dress and deportment had reminiscent touches of the buck about them. His early life had been spent in the city, and on Sunday he still arrayed his person in broad-cloth, and compassed his head with a high hat. When the ceremonious head-gear was removed, it was seen that the head was bald, with two wisps of iron-grey hair carefully parted at the back, and brushed with a lick upwards over the ears. Abundant collar, after the fashion of the English Liberal leader of the day, flanked a long but well-trimmed beard. Add an aquiline nose, russet cheeks, and keen, cheery blue eyes, and the picture is complete.

"Father" was the glass of fashion, the mould of precise form to the family, and accentuated "mother's" lack of

symmetry and Spartan-like simplicity of style. They had been Methodists; and were so still when the necessity for distinguishing one sect of Protestants from another arose in this out-of-the-way corner.

The girls rode; and the two sons shared between them the duty of driving the bullock team. They did it under exceptional difficulties on these occasions, for the accustomed appeal to Daisy to "Gee-up," or Strawberry to "Come-e-woa" were robbed of their pregnancy by Sunday limitations of address.

These church-goings were regulated by the moon. Full-moon Sundays were selected, in order that the difficulties of the road might be better encountered. In addition to the family party, the parson and "Jim" accompanied the patriarchal turnout, and rode sometimes ahead, sometimes well behind the family vehicle. "Jim" had another name of course, though most folks had to think of it for a minute, so seldom was it used. It happened, however, to be Hungerford when you did think of it. He and Mary Rowe had been brought up almost together. Their two families were owners of adjoining stations—Wollawillie, the Rows' property, and Glenfyne, the Hungerfords'. In childhood the boy and girl had been almost inseparable. They rode together, hunted together, quarrelled, abused one another, declared that "hate" was too inexpressive a word to describe their feelings of mutual detestation; but let the unwary stranger intervene, and no alliance of European powers was ever knit into so close a bond of loyalty. So Jim naturally rode with Mary, and the parson communed with his thoughts during the ceaseless flow of Sheila Dalton's confidences. It sufficed if he said "Indeed!" "Really!" or "Dear me!" at decent intervals.

When the ridge of the first hill was reached, the little

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folk in the dray clustered round "mother," and lifted up their voices in one of the old hymns that cling close to our hearts. How many generations of mothers have passed them on to us, as we in turn pass them on to our children! Then the older folk closed round the dray to add a deeper harmony to the familiar words—

"Abide with me! fast falls the eventide;
The darkness deepens; Lord, with me abide!"

Thus in the moonlight, that cast fantastic shadows from the trees across their path, they journeyed on—the religion of their forbears all sufficient for their need—to the home at the end of the track.

CHAPTER III

"Do you remember, boys," said Sheldon, dropping in one afternoon on his way from Court, where an unhappy client had just been cast in damages and consequent costs—"do you remember the Rows? I wrote to them some time back about Vaughan planting himself on the land, '*quiquid plantatur solo solo cedit*'—there's a trifle of law Latin for you. Mrs. Rowe is staying with friends at Potts Point, and the good lady wants you to dine with them. But she will be down town to-day, and will give me a call, when I shall introduce you. There are a couple of lasses from the mountain fastnesses with her, but of course that's of no interest to you."

"Oh!" said Vaughan, with awakened interest, "do you mean two nice girls?"

"'Nice' indeed! May the devil take you and your 'niceness'! I do believe verily that if an Englishman rose from the dead, and was interviewed by the local press on the joys of the blessed Paradise, he would describe it as a 'nice' place. Yes, begad, and add—'but you should see London!'"

"Or Paris," added Temple.

"True for ye, Temple; it would probably be more appropriate to the part of the 'hereafter' you'd be acquainted with. However, I'll let you know when they call"; and off the Doctor went, his wig pulled over his forehead, serving as a foil to the wealth of colour in his nose.

"The end approaches, Temple. A few more weeks

and a modest legal library will be for sale—a sacrifice. Plea, demurrer, not to mention our good old friends—rebutter and surrebutter—with all of whom I have but a nodding acquaintance, will pass away, unhappy offspring of mediæval days, who have been exiled to this little angle of the world. No longer shall that erudite and enthralling work, ‘Bullen and Leake,’ use up my supply of midnight oil! Oh! pleading of the early Britons or thereabout—farewell! A long farewell to all your mysteries!”

“Have you finally decided?”

“Yes, finally; it is the land or nothing.”

“You mean the land and nothing! However, go your own way; we shall see. Come in, come in!”

“It is Joseph! *toujours* Joseph! One waits with bated breath thinking ‘it is Dives in distress by his attorney at the door’—and lo, it is Joseph! This region seems too celestial for the lawyer’s clerk to mount to. Architecturally in our profession, the higher one goes up the ladder the lower one comes down the stairs. By the time you are ripe for the Bench, you will be round in the basement, or in the family vault. Another legal paradox for you, Temple the learned!”

“Please, the Doctor says I am to say he would like to see you, if you ain’t engaged.”

“Say we shall be disengaged shortly”; and Joseph departed to deliver his message.

“Now, Vaughan, brush up and carry the fortress of the old lady’s heart. It is susceptible to the sorrows of the hardy pioneer, so Sheldon declares.”

“And you?”

“Oh! I am only to play a sympathetic rôle.”

“But the young ladies!”

“Ah! the young ladies! Well, I shall open my arms to them, say ten years hence, when you have sufficiently

milked the cow, and I the public. Do you remember the lines about that jade Venus, who delighted in the sport of mating those who will never make a pair? That's what happened to the young man in love—when Horace drank Falernian in Mecænas' villa; and that's what happens to-day. Neither time nor manners change with regard to that matter, so beware! Hurry up; we mustn't overstrain our assumption of business cares."

"My young friends from England," said the Doctor, with a wave of his hand, as they entered the room. "This is Mr. Temple of the Inner, and Mr. Vaughan of the Middle Temple. Both, ahem! learned in the law. Mrs. Rowe, Miss Rowe, Miss Dalton, of Woollawillie Station."

"Are you," said Mrs. Rowe, after Sheldon's ceremonious introduction, "are you the son of Martin Vaughan of 'The Rookery,' who wrote to my husband some time back?"

"I am, Mrs. Rowe."

"I believe things are not—are not—well, what they were with your father? You want, so the Doctor says, to leave the city? Your father was a great sportsman, my husband tells me, and kept a pack of—beadles or something of that kind. I know it suggested church to me."

"Oh, beagles. Yes, they gave us up long ago, preliminary to a like procedure on the part of our friends; consequently I am looking round—seeking the experience that may lead to a fortune, or even a modest livelihood. Perhaps the dear old gentleman may have hinted something of the kind to you?"

"Your father and Mr. Rowe were close friends for many years, and what he said was confidential—though not to me. He said—now let me think what it was—ah! something like this—" and a twinkle of the eye lit up her motherly face; "'he is not a bad-hearted lad, but wants to be driven with a tight rein.' Now don't be angry with

me; old friends will say these things to one another. Then he asked us to keep an eye on you. We have sons of our own, and what we would wish others to do to them in a strange land we would like, for your father's sake, to do for you. Let us shake hands now and be friends;" and she put out her big hand impulsively. Vaughan, touched by the generous overture, took it in a hearty grasp.

"Thank you; and thank you again! One gets a little disheartened you know, and——"

"You want to be mothered a little, eh? All men need to be mothered at times. Well, we are going to take you away for a long holiday, if you will come. It will be experience at all events, and you will be able to look about you. I must say, with all respect to young gentlemen as learned as our old friend, Dr. Sheldon, says you are, that spending your life in a room—however pleasant a room it may be, and however cheerful your books may be—though the backs of them do not look too attractive—is rather a waste of existence. It suggests to me growing mushrooms in a cellar. Poor mushrooms! But there Peter and I have faced life so long in the open that perhaps we are prejudiced in its favour."

Meantime Temple conversed with the daughter and cousin, rather frigidly at first, but the frank nature of the bush-bred girls soon overcame the preliminary difficulty, and aided by the Doctor's genial humour, the little party speedily lost any sense of restraint that at first existed, and their tongues loosed.

"What do you do with yourselves all day in these rooms, Mr. Temple, if it is not rude to ask?"

"Oh dear no—though it is hard to explain exactly. Well, we study, or we think we do; and then we wait, and we hope."

"True for ye, my boy," interposed Sheldon. "We come in here hoping, and continue hoping—and then after a while it may be, black care sits with us, and we grow idle. Perhaps a chance comes after long years, and we find we're too rusty to use it. So the black devil moves in with his portmanteau, and stays with us as a permanent lodger. But there now! I was thinking of a poor creature, a sandy-haired little man who came in here, years ago. There were a wife and some sandy-haired children; and finally, like a hobgoblin story, the black devil ate him up. But that's an incident by the way. Most of the young blackguards who come here struggle along cheerfully enough; and it's surprising how many get their heads above water—yes, indeed, and often keep them there floating on paper—as one might say. Sure it's hope deferred that runs long bills, and a merry heart that carries us through."

"And do poor folk in trouble about law and things come to you for advice? I think that must be nice, don't you Mary? One would hear so much."

"Ho! ho!" laughed the Doctor; "sure Sheila, my dear, you bring the fragrance of the bush with you. It's amazing the innocence of the young creatures—and not them alone, indeed! Do you remember, Temple, the poor old soul who came with a letter from that simple-hearted brother of mine?"

"Now, Doctor, you mustn't say anything against Father Dermot," interjected Mary, "he is one of the dearest men in the world."

"That he is indeed, but he has no idea of the world, or professional etiquette or the like, my dear. It was a matter of a trespass by a goat. The woman had been in the father's parish when he was in Sydney, and so she wrote to him in her distress, and came down here one day

with the goat, and tied it up to the leg of Joseph's table. Then she wandered about asking for the Counsellor (meaning myself). And when she found me, my dears, and put a letter from that simpleton of a brother of mine in my hand, she laid hold of me, and told me her family history for five generations back, and a pedigree of the goat for as many more. And the manners of that goat: its delicacy of feeling, its moral education, the virtuous way in which it would turn from a neighbour's vine, and refuse to look on another goat's goods! The creature, as I afterwards discovered, had eaten up half a wardrobe hung out from the weekly wash. Sure I'll never hear the end of that goat!"

"Have you written a book about Australia yet, Mr. Temple?" asked Mary with an air of extreme innocence.

"A book about Australia? Why should I write a book about Australia?"

"Why, you've been here quite six months; surely you ought to know all about us. Some of your great men have done it in very much less time."

"Perhaps they were very clever men?"

"Perhaps. Do you know I visited England two years ago. I was there for over six months."

"And have you written a book about us?" asked Temple quizzically.

"No, though I have it composed in my mind, but alas! my mind draggles when I take up a pen."

"Well, won't you tell me the gist of your book? Were you disappointed?"

"Disappointed! I could scarcely be that; there was too much kindness to leave room for disappointment. But the general impression is that I seemed always to be at school. Everybody wanted to teach me. For example, the lady who took me for the first time to the Abbey

anticipated that I would be overcome with emotion. Poor dear lady! She was always watching for impressions. She wanted to know how things impressed me, and was anxious that they should impress me in what she thought the right way. I did say 'Wonderful!' once or twice, not to disappoint her altogether, and you should have seen the pride in her face. Once I said 'Stupendous!' and the dear old thing was so overcome that she kissed me publicly. But that was all for love of a dear, sweet soul, an English gentlewoman. I was not so complaisant with the others."

"Meaning thereby?" queried Temple in a strain reminiscent of libels.

"The young gentleman and others who pitied my exile from the centre of civilisation, and who also taught me. It was also assumed that if I did not regard matters from their standpoint, I was necessarily wrong. I said nothing, though I knew I was right all the time."

"So proving that the antipodean woman is true to her sex?"

"Well, I knew I was right. Again, you English people have no open questions. That was one thing that amused—I beg your pardon—interested me."

"Amusement is the spice of interest," said Temple with epigrammatic courtesy.

"'Family' seems to be the touchstone of all English opinion. You take your politics and religion from your family, and certain professions and callings of one kind and another seem to run in families. The really established religion of your country is ancestor-worship, after the third and fourth generation. The religious influence is not so marked in the early generations from the founder."

Temple chuckled, and his face brightened into interest at this frank criticism.

"There is one powerful god of the nation you haven't mentioned—he grinds his mill in the city."

"Oh! he is not peculiar to you; he is also one of our gods, therefore he need not be mentioned. Then there is another little characteristic of your folk. You are so delightfully self-satisfied; though, after all, that is very human—we have a little of it ourselves, you know. You will promise not to think me very wicked if I tell you one thought—suggested in church too?"

"It would take a good deal to convince me of your wickedness." And Temple, as he paid his little compliment, felt the awkwardness of a modern young man getting into the clothes of an eighteenth-century beau.

"Well, I thought there is really a serious omission from the biblical account of the world's beginning. England isn't mentioned in it, and the Englishman had no special creation. Properly the account ought to read: 'On the eighth day God made the English—and it was very good.'"

"And so it was, Miss Rowe, very good."

"Perhaps in my heart I agree with you. Then again, there is not much—what shall I call it?—say, independence of judgment among your folk. You are all gathered into schools—schools of thought, schools of art, schools of taste; and if you don't enrol yourself in some one or other recognised school—well, you are literally nowhere—a sort of pilgrim on the outskirts of life. That amused me—I mean interested me, immensely. Now, I like a book or a picture because it pleases me—me individually, and reject it from the same personal standpoint. But your Englishman—what do you call it?—suspends his judgment until he has duly classified the book or picture, and upon that classification depends its acceptance or rejection. Until I found out the secret, it puzzled me

how some of your countrymen and women discovered virtues, not perceived by an outsider like myself, in certain books and pictures. For example, there is an author whose style leaves my mind in a hopeless muddle. It sets me in pursuit of literary 'will-o'-the-wisps.' One seems, to use a 'doggy' expression, to *nose* an idea, but never to succeed in running it to earth. You remember, Sheila?" she said, turning to her cousin.

"Oh yes, I know. Six volumes grace our limited library, and one cut."

"Well, once at a dance I met a little man, who patronised me to quite a distressing degree. He also was a self-constituted teacher to the outer Australian barbarian. On this occasion he was improving my mind in its attitude to the literature of what he regarded as the inner circle. He asked me my opinion of this particular author, and I replied, with childlike candour, that I liked to know what one sentence meant before I went on to the next. Then the little wretch smiled in such an aggravating way, and said, 'You must read him as a whole, and seek the inner meaning'; and when I asked, 'Please, what does that mean?' he said it was our next dance, and whirled me off. It is so very hard to get satisfaction out of you English."

"But we are not all like that," protested Temple.

"Not all; but I take things broadly—as you take us, you know. The hard and fast lines of social distinction also interested me; the social falling off from establishment to dissent; the distinction between the professional and commercial classes; and so on—so little noticed here, so marked there. I shall never forget the sensation I once caused—a sensation of absolute silence—by the casual remark that grandfather, on mother's side, when he landed in the colony, worked on the wharves. My hostess,

who was a most hospitable lady, told me privately that if in future I really felt bound as a matter of conscience to refer to our 'founder,' it might sound better to say that he was 'associated with the mercantile marine.' "

"The knife of the surgeon is the only simile for your frank criticism, Miss Rowe. But have you nothing good to say of us?"

"The good I think of you lies in my heart; it is only the ill that tips my tongue, and so you see it may fly away. The other remains."

"Very prettily said, my dear," interposed Sheldon, who had greatly enjoyed this baiting of the Saxon.

"And what have you to say, Miss Dalton, about our unhappy race?" asked Temple.

"Oh! my opinion cannot count, I have not been there. Why, this is my first visit to a city. You may see me any afternoon with my eyes glued to the shop windows. Daily I have marvellous adventures in the streets. I forget how many times I have been rescued from beneath horses' feet, and dear Auntie is immensely relieved when I arrive home with all my limbs, and still in possession of my faculties. She says the only member I might lose, without breaking her heart, would be my tongue."

"Sure, the man who'd pick it up would find a golden nugget, my dear. It does my heart good to see you skipping along the pavement like a lamb from the pasture."

"With you as the shepherd, Doctor? You would require a crook and a pipe to complete the picture."

"Well, it's a scrannel pipe I play, and there's a deadly indifference of the public to pay the poor piper. But your mother is going."

"I have arranged everything with Mr. Vaughan, Doctor; he will return with us when we leave Sydney."

"That's right, my boy; go on the land: 'a noble

peasantry,' begad. The peasant toils, and the city gets the produce; and that's a fair division from our point of view at all events. You couldn't be in better hands."

"Perhaps some day, Mr. Temple, when you have a vacation, you will visit us. You will be heartily welcome."

And so, amid cordial words and handshaking, the consultation in Sheldon's chambers came to an end.

"Pretty, bright girl, Miss Dalton!" remarked Vaughan, stroking his light moustache.

"Intelligent girl, Miss Rowe! Rather prejudiced and provincial, but knows her own mind. Good wife for some one who wants one, perhaps," added Temple. "Dear old lady, the mother!—though just a trifle dowdy—the children, I suppose; deuce of a country this for children. When do you leave?"

"Oh! not for a few weeks yet."

CHAPTER IV

WOOLLAWILLIE homestead commanded a magnificent panorama of the surrounding country; to the north, the mountain ridge on which it stood sloped away to the valley, which gave access to the plains beyond; to the south, range after range towered up to scantily-wooded heights, that in the winter season were topped with snow; westward lay a succession of lower hills, in whose dark, moist gullies fern life grew luxuriantly; to the east the hills sloped gradually to the river, with its alluvial flat, water-covered in flood time for miles along the course. The river itself twisted like a silver snake among the blue-grey of the gums, and the widespread patches of apple-tree. It was a good day's journey to the coast. From a point higher up the ranges on a clear, crisp day, the distant Pacific could be seen against a curve, like the outline of a new moon, marking a long stretch of some fifty miles of beach.

When Vaughan (who had reached the homestead the previous night) rose in the morning he crossed the deep verandah, and stepped into a garden wet with dew, that sparkled in the early sunlight. He drew in a deep breath of the fresh, tingling air. How beautiful it all was! How beautiful! And the city far away! The very thought of its distance gave a zest to his enjoyment, and he shook his shoulders as if to throw off the burden of the life that had oppressed him for so many months. The blood of youth coursed rapidly through his veins, till he could have shouted like a boy, or rolled in the wet grass at his feet,

and extravagantly kissed old mother earth, the kindly mother from whom we draw our life, and into whose bosom we are gathered when our days are done. It was so good that he felt he must cry out; and so he did, with a "tally-ho" that would have astonished the faithless beagles of his father's vanished pack, and as it was, brought a burst of laughter from Mary and Sheila, who had come to seek him with news of breakfast.

"So you have entered into your inheritance, Mr. Vaughan—the land and all that therein is?" cried Mary, as the young man wheeled suddenly at the sound of the voices. "Is it not a goodly heritage; better than a chair in chambers, and a romantic outlook on law-books?"

"Here and for ever, Miss Rowe, I renounce the law and all its cases. Isn't it glorious! Look at it! See the mist, and the blue and grey of the hills beyond; and the river, the shining river; dear me! can't we sing something about the river? This is the most intoxicating air man ever breathed!"

"And therefore should not be taken without 'a trifle on the stomach,' as Father Dermot would say," chimed in Sheila. "But I'm glad you like it. It is the dearest and loveliest spot in the world, and I can say that truly, without the prejudice of your traveller, for I know no lovelier. I like to see it best when it is washing its face of a morning, just like this. But the porridge is cooling, and you can smell the bacon. Don't you like the smell of bacon on a crisp, bright morning? With the fragrance of frizzling bacon in your nose, and this"—with a sweep of her hand—"in your eyes, don't you feel that God is in His Heaven?"

"The confusion of bacon with theology, Sheila," drily remarked Mary, "discounts the latter; but come along, or father will be impatient."

At one end of the low, broad dining-room, a log fire was burning on the open hearth, for it was the close of autumn, and merging into early winter. At this altitude the early morning and the evening were chilly enough to make the fireside, with its comfortable lounge chairs, a tempting place for an idle half-hour. The table, covered with spotless napery, was decorated with a bowl of roses, from which the dew had not yet dried. The breakfast was of plain, substantial food; porridge with creamy milk, rashers curled till they resembled yellow leaves streaked with pink, toast crisp and dry, and johnnie-cakes, marmalade and fragrant coffee. An appetite—no jaded city appetite here, no dalliance with trifles; but the healthy appetite that gave a benediction to every bite.

The meal was introduced by grace pronounced by "mother," on whose broad shoulders the burden of this and other religious exercises rested. The place of the morning newspaper was supplied by a discussion on the day's duties. Father and sons, mother and daughter, arranged the various matters of station management and household economy that had to be seen to.

However, on this the first morning of their guest's visit, the conversation was more general. The two boys, like all bush lads, were lying quietly by till they had taken the new man's measure, with a lurking hope of deriving entertainment from his subsequent city shortcomings. "Father,"—sometimes addressed as "Dad," with the familiarity of colonial children, between whom and their parents comradeship often replaces the more respectful, though not more affectionate relations of the English family—seized the opportunity to give Vaughan an idea of the land laws of the country, though from a somewhat prejudiced point of view.

It was the time when the effect of free selection before

survey was still felt by the old squatting families ; and the resentment of the large landholders to the inroads of the settlers who had "peacocked" their runs was burning out but slowly.

From time to time the old man recounted incidents in the agrarian warfare between squatter and free selector, and attempted to justify the "dummy,"—that is to say, the bogus settler, who took up land, ostensibly for genuine settlement, but to be subsequently conveyed to the squatter, so saving to him the choice portions of his run—as a necessary evil of the day. As a matter of fact, in his own case, Peter Rowe had tempered the bitterness of the warfare by kindly acts, that many a poor selector remembered with gratitude—at least where the evidence of a genuine desire to live on the land, and make a home, was shown.

Father Dermot could tell of not a few compatriots who, with a deplorably limited knowledge of bushcraft and a large family, but fighting heroically against the difficulties that beset the little settler on the land, had met with a helping hand from the man, out of whose run they had carved their conditional purchases, added to from time to time as opportunity and the law permitted. Not once nor twice the man, whose property, as he deemed it, they were parcelling out, gave them generous assistance with grass or water, or even the loan of a team. At least on old Peter's run they were not worried, and harried, and starved, as was the case on many another. The selectors, on their part, were not ungrateful ; for they made return, in a passive way, by giving him a larger degree of peace than fell to many a less generous enemy.

But the old gentleman, as those advanced in age are apt to do, lived in the past, and spoke as though the sun of pastoral prosperity were setting on the land. The old days were the grand days, and he would prose by the hour

of the "fifties," when cattle were sent down to the distant gold rushes to realise fabulous prices. They were the days—the golden days! Now all was changed; the old squatters were passing away, some to their graves in the decline of fortune, and others to linger a few years after the banks had foreclosed on their properties, and the old homesteads were occupied by city managers, who might know a working bullock from a heifer, perhaps not even that.

All this Vaughan gathered from time to time, here a little, there a little; till at last he came to surmise that, behind the apparent abundance and security of the family life at Woollawillie, there was a skeleton that peeped, ever and ever more frequently, from old Peter's cupboard.

The surmise was only too true. "How could they part with it?" the old couple, in the seclusion of their bedroom, would ask each other. "After all these years, Peter, after all our labour!" Then, like children—children of that age of faith passing rapidly away—they would commit their lives to the good God who knoweth best.

George came in before breakfast, just in time for "mother" to give him a cup of steaming coffee. He was the eldest son, and lived on the flat in the picturesque, slab-sided ruin, where the family had dwelt in the early days. George was a tall, sinewy, sallow-faced man; deliberate and scant of utterance; a prodigious smoker. He smoked all day, and fell asleep in his bunk at night with the pipe-stem between his teeth.

Her eldest son was the cause of much spiritual concern to "mother." In his bachelor retreat he had collected a little library of works that were viewed askance by the old folk. Tom Paine and Ingersoll rubbed shoulders with Darwin and Huxley; from the latter of whom George derived such information as could be gleaned after the

elimination of technical references and unaccustomed words. George ploughed steadily through the "Origin of Species" and the "Descent of Man," pipe in mouth and with knitted brow, relieving the tension with "The Mistakes of Moses," or some equally diverting work; till, after some years of this intellectual exercise, he had smoked and fogged himself into a condition of mental haze, in which he completely lost sight of his Creator, and beheld man, as it were, afar off. George's researches in the matter of the origin and development of the young kangaroo were widely known in these parts. It gave a new zest to the hunt, and a practical turn to his scientific reading. He and Parson Fennel had a human link on the dog side. George's bunk was generally a confusion of grey blankets and puppies. The origin of dog was being continuously wrought out at this camp. All animals—the woolly bears, who cocked their ears and blinked at him from the branches of the tall gums; the 'possum, the kangaroo-rat, and the rest of the bush fauna—took kindly to George; and he, like William the Norman, who loved the red deer as though he were their father, returned to the full their confidence. Save in the way of such legitimate warfare as kangaroo-hunting and duck-shooting, the beasts of the field and birds of the air had nothing to fear at his hand.

George had come up to meet the guest, and join in a ride along the river flats, to give him some idea of the country before settling down to the routine of station life.

"Fennel said he would be round to see some pups to-day, and will come on. Jim will pick us up on the way. We'll lunch at the Falls," he announced.

The girls, at whose suggestion the outing had been arranged, went off to prepare the luncheon; whilst Vaughan followed his host to be provided with a mount. The selection of a horse was left to George, who exercised discrimina-

tion with a reserve of doubt, shared by the boys, as to their guest's accomplishments as a rider.

However, when Vaughan, who had attired his nether limbs in a brand new pair of riding breeches which had formed part of his outfit by a London tailor, got across his nag, the boys admitted with sympathetic disappointment that it wasn't the first time he had put leg over a horse. The dazzling purity of his breeches was the only item that they could conscientiously criticise with adverse comment. A few weeks in the saddle would, however, mend even that defect. It seemed scarcely fair to the boys.

The material for luncheon, billy, pannikins, and tucker, were strung to the dees of the girls' saddles, and by nine o'clock the party started down the spur leading to the flat. The river was down; and they splashed across the shallow ford to the opposite side, picking up Fennel at George's hut, where he had breakfasted, spending afterwards an hour in critical examination of the latest litter. For a mile or so they travelled by the river side, crossing and recrossing its devious course; then through a patch of swampy scrub, and into good timber on rising ground. From this point the track led up a spur that for a time carried them away from the river, which, high-banked on either side, twisted and curled round the base of the hills, till soon it was locked in the embrace of a deep gorge, where the sunlight failed to penetrate. The riding track later sidled down into the green twilight of a fern gully, so dim, that Jim's appearance at this point had something uncanny about it.

The damp recesses of the gully, where the light, filtering through the leaves of tree-ferns and cabbage palms, made a laced canopy overhead; the depressing silence; the odour of the decaying leaf-mould underfoot, where

the horses trod noiselessly, gave a sense of unexpectedness to the presence of a human being. However, it was only "old Jim"—old not by reason of years, but in the fashion of calling that means the warmer kind of friendship. Jim and mistrust were unacquainted. Not that he was of the stuff they make stage heroes of, or had any great exploit to his name, or was a mightier hunter than scores of his fellows; but he was "white." To be a "white" man is to be clean of heart, truthful, staunch, setting aside judicial impartiality to stick by a friend. Jim espoused a friend's quarrel, and might or might not inquire into its merits afterwards. He had in a large degree that native self-respect which men of his class, living the independent life of the bush, almost universally possess. It is the man of the city who bends the knee or bows the head in sufferance. In the bush, a man stands straight and square before his fellow-men.

A chorus of "Jim!" broke the silence, and friendly voices welcomed him. As he joined the group, he fell in where he always fell in—at Mary's side—and succeeded in getting a hand that he wanted in his for a moment. The conversation had been languishing for some time before Jim's arrival, but now picked up again. Vaughan, feeling that he must establish a reputation for good-fellowship from the start, had raked his memory for anecdotes and jokes, some of the latter so decrepit by age that they were just able—and no more—to sustain the burden of a laugh. But laughter on such a day as this, with youth and the absence of care, came to the lips without an effort. Such genuine laughter, too! ringing out without restraint, straight from the "merry heart that doeth good like a medicine." So, with laughter and snatches of song, and the bandying backward and forward of repartee and comment, the riding party reached the Falls.

After the river, on its tortuous way to the sea, had passed through the dark defile of the hills, it reappeared to flash for a moment in the sunlight, and then leap into the glistening pool at the foot of the moss-patched cliff; breaking, on its swift descent, against a lip of rock that dashed it into a veil of silvery mist. Far away, through the tangle of foliage that covered the valley below, looking like so much stunted scrub growth, though in reality the outspread branches of tall trees, the glint of its winding course could be traced by a green pathway through the sage-tinted forest, itself starred by the spreading fronds of fern-trees.

Here they camped for their picnic, with a magnificent panorama of mountains, holding in their fortress cliffs the densely-wooded valley, spread before their eyes.

After the meal, George and Vaughan scrambled down the face of the Fall to the point where the jutting crag caught for a moment the water in a foaming cup. Here the effect of a rainbow on the falling spray could be seen to advantage. Jim and the parson did not make the descent; but, pleading laziness, remained in camp. By-and-by, Mary and Jim strolled off together on an alleged search for specimens of a rare fern; though no excuse was needed, as every one knew that the latter had set his heart on some day bringing his boyhood's sweetheart to Glenfyne as its mistress.

"Mary, may I say something?" questioned Jim, when, after scrambling over many boulders, and finding the sought-for specimens, they rested for a while in the cool, moist shade of a pocket carpeted with maiden-hair.

"Something?" she queried; "what something is there you may not say to me?"

"Ah! well," and he nervously played with a sprig of sassafras, snapped from a bough at hand, stripping its

leaves as though in childish fashion he were counting "this year ; next year"—and so to "never." "Well, something that you ought to know, you must know"—and he emphasised the "must"—"yet something that we—that I—have never put in words."

"Yes, Jim ?"

"We have grown up together, we have played, quarrelled, and made up, and been the best of chums. Eh !"

"The best of chums ; brother and sister could not be more," she said, looking him frankly in the face.

"Brother and sister are often less ; and you know," he blurted out impetuously, "'brother and sister' are all very well, but is there not—cannot we—be something more ? My dear sweetheart, I love you ; will you marry me ?" And it was out, and the thing done. He was glad to have it over, for good or ill.

Then Mary looked away musingly. Nothing that Jim might say could upset the tranquillity of her friendship ; he was so familiar to her, so long a chum, back to the days of torn frocks and tumbled hair. As she sat with her chin poised on her hands, looking in dreamy abstraction through the framework of foliage to the far-reaching valley, patched with the shadows of passing clouds, she felt that her own impassiveness was Jim's answer.

Jim, faithful, undemonstrative Jim, sprinkled the ground at his feet with fresh offerings of leaves, searching his mind for apt phrases, and finding none, till the sense of relief that had followed in ridding his lips of their crude declaration was replaced by a sense of nervous impatience. At last he became conscious that he was a dull fool in the presence of the girl he loved ; for love her he did, with an earnestness that seemed to paralyse, not to nerve his tongue.

"Jim," she said at last, breaking the awkward pause ;

"Jim, where does friendship end and love begin? Or are they one, and is friendship love?"

"No," he replied, finding his tongue at last. "Love is more—far more. Mary, I love you; it is not friendship I want, it is you; you to be my own. Dearest, I cannot find the words I want, they will not come to me; I'm only a poor-witted beggar—the poorest kind of lover—but I love you; I love you!" and the love he bore her shone in his eyes, and softened his face with outspoken eloquence.

Mary's abstraction vanished as she saw it, and she rose with a quick, sympathetic gesture. "That way? Yes, it is different from friendship—and oh, Jim! my dear old Jim, my playmate, my best of friends—I—I do not feel it so."

There was pity and understanding in her voice, but the love that shone in the man's face had no reflex in hers.

"I am only a girl, Jim," she pleaded; "and a girl dreams of love as a divine event to come into her life some day, and at its coming, makes it a new, a different, a better thing for her. When it comes, it must be absolute, and complete, and there is no hesitation—for there can be none—surely? It is not friendship, oh no!; it is not anything but love. It is unerring; and neither pain nor sacrifice, neither poverty, humiliation, nor death itself can quench it in a woman's heart. And oh! Jim, my chum, that love—that light—is not with us."

He pleaded for hope, for time, vainly. It was not hers to give.

Then Jim's heart went cold, and he turned away, for his face twitched with pain. It was over, however, in a minute; he had not kept a tight rein and a cool head for nothing all his life. When he faced her again, it was with a return, though perhaps not wholly, of the phlegmatic

temper that marked a nature naturally sensitive and sincere.

He held out his hand, and she took it in the spirit of frank comradeship. "The same good friends?" he said laconically, and she answered with a pressure of his hand.

When they reached the camp, the others had returned; and soon afterwards the picnickers turned their backs on the Falls, and began the journey homeward. As it was desirable to reach the flat before sundown, the rapid pace they travelled precluded sustained conversation. Vaughan and Mary led the way, the parson and Sheila following. Jim talked "dog" and politics intermittently to George, till gradually the string of riders straggled out.

Mary and Vaughan rode well ahead, and soon after the river had been crossed at the last fording-place on the return journey, and the flat began to open out, they came on Yanakee and "Tatters." They had been after kangaroos; and Jack had a couple of skins across the pommel of his saddle. Before they reached him, however, they heard the sharp click of a stock-whip. It was the overture to "Tatters' life drama. The unfortunate wretch limped and stumbled, and stumbled and limped, leaving a track of blood on the trail. He had been badly ripped.

"You——! will you never get home?" Click! click! With a yelp of agony "Tatters" struggled on, now blindly in the dust, now making for the tussocks of grass, to escape the lash.

Mary rode ahead of Vaughan, and saw the miserable business. The blood quickened in her veins, and her breath came and went in rapid succession.

Click! click! never a missing hit! You could see the hair fly as the lash caught him, now on the flank, now on the back.

"You devil!" She had caught up to Yanakee, and the

words flashed through her lips, as the light riding-whip she held cut across his face, leaving a white weal that became a bar of crimson.

He howled with pain for a moment ; then with a dig of the spur wheeled his horse round, and raised his stock-whip, his face distorted with passion. Before his arm could swing the long thong, Vaughan was on him.

The impact sent Yanakee out of his saddle—and a moment later Mary had a bridle in her hand, as Vaughan stood over him.

Just then the parson and Sheila arrived. Fennel saw "Tatters," who came limping, with a world of agony and appeal in his eyes, to the side of his master. Fennel's face was white as he slipped off his saddle. Yanakee had picked himself up, and stood facing Vaughan, when the parson touched the latter on the shoulder.

"Mr. Vaughan, this is my affair. You'll excuse me, but it's mine. It is my dog, and this is my affair."

Vaughan glanced at the little parson, who looked to him as slight as a boy.

"Leave it to me, Mr. Fennel ; you take the ladies on, I'll settle it."

Meantime Yanakee blustered and cursed, calling on the two of them to face him.

"That's my dog," persisted Fennel ; "look at him ! By God," he muttered, forgetting his calling in the wild rage that whitened his face, "it's my fight too."

"Well, I'll have my turn afterwards," conceded Vaughan, as Hungerford and Rowe came up ; and he turned aside to explain to them what had happened.

"Look here, Fennel," said Jim, "the brute's too filthy to fight. I'll thrash him till he can't crawl. Give me your whip, Mary, and yours, Sheila. Now, take the girls away, George." He did so reluctantly, for he too loved a fight.

Jim gripped the whips, and jumping to the ground, made for Yanakee. But the parson stepped between.

"It's my dog, Jim ; it's my dog, and it's my fight," and he gripped Hungerford's wrist. "You may kill him if you like afterwards, old man, but I'll fight if I have to die for it. It's my dog and it's my fight, I say." Then as the pale, set face looked into his, it flashed on Jim, and he understood.

The parson had once told him that "Tatters" came into this world on a heap of dried grass in the lean-to, the night that another life—and nine-tenths of the parson's with it—had gone into the shadow.

"He'll have his fight," he said to Vaughan ; and he thought to himself—there are worse pains than a bruised body. "I'll chip in afterwards."

Then Fennel entered on his affair, with the two men as spectators. And Yanakee laughed and blasphemed, and asked for a man to fight.

Fennel said quietly, "I'm your man, Yanakee!" and struck him fair between the eyes. Yanakee spat out an oath, and sprang at him.

It wasn't a prize-fight, and it wouldn't have made even a decent dog-fight. After that first blow, the parson never got in again. He went down time after time, but he never funkcd, only besought Jim to let him alone, and give him his fight to the end. At last he went down with a thud that dazed him ; and when he staggered to his feet it was only to fall again. Then Jim thought his time had come, and making for Yanakee, caught him by the throat ; the shirt was too flimsy to get a grip on, and the brute found that, struggle as he might, the grip on his throat never relaxed, but closed in with deadly certainty. He was forced back till he slipped on his knees. Then he tried to pull his opponent down. Everything swam round him ;

he could not breathe ; and then lash, lash, lash with regular stroke came the whip on arms, and shoulders, and back, till, with a final effort, Hungerford threw the almost unconscious man upon the ground.

Then he and Vaughan picked up Fennel—such a gory, bedraggled parson, bruised and sore in every limb. “Tatters,” though, had found him before, found him only to die, but with Fennel’s battered face close to his, and his master’s arm around him.

They left Yanakee rolling on the ground, with a skin striped with fire.

CHAPTER V

AFTER two years' experience on the cattle station Vaughan, looking the picture of health, and brimful of energy and buoyant spirit, had come to Sydney on a spell, charged with a hearty invitation to Temple to return with him for the long vacation. After his isolation in the hills, it was exhilarating to be once more in the human hive. At the top of King Street, as he strolled along the morning after his arrival, he nearly ran into a couple of bewigged youngsters, with robes fresh as their shining morning faces. Big with the importance of a District Court case, they fluttered across the roadway to the dark, ill-ventilated court-house. A little farther down, other bewigged men crossed and recrossed to the Supreme Court. They were sallow-faced, self-absorbed, and not one of the many knew him. "How soon," he reflected, "one drops out of one rank of work into another in this new country! Only a couple of years ago I, too, was fluttering about these courts, with an amazing assumption of great cares upon my shoulders; and now I am forgotten. By Jove, there's old Sheldon! wonder if he'll recognise me—Doctor, don't you know me?"

"What! Vaughan! Well, it's good for blind eyes to see you. Come along till I get these ancient trappings off, and we'll have a drink, me boy. Sure, there's nothing complete in this country without a drink. It's a country without Lazarus, for, bedad, you can always get a drink. But how are you?—though I needn't ask. The land seems to agree with you; maybe you'll find it suits the

constitution; better than the pocket. I suppose you know all about it now, eh?"

They reached Sheldon's chambers, and passed Joseph on the way, still absorbed seemingly in hieroglyphics, and still short of raiment as to his ankles and wrists.

"And where's Temple? Is he still in the same old den?"

"Oh! Temple moved out long ago. This rabbit-warren of young hopefuls and decayed juniors is the bottom rung of the ladder. Sure, it's a wonder it doesn't break with the multitude of our feet; but Temple's a coming man, sir."

"Glad to hear it, Sheldon; always knew he would get along."

"That young man is a born general. He knows how to combine his forces. I'm not denying that he's a good lawyer, for he's all that. He's got the keenest nose for a demurrer of any man I know. Then he's English, and there's a weakness in the high heavens of our profession for anything English. Then he's an elegant dresser, and in a democratic country that goes a long way. A 'Bond Street' coat on your back, my boy, will shove you up faster than the grace of God in your hearts—indeed, the latter as an investment pays no dividend nowadays. Then, man alive, he's stormed the citadel of the elect called Society in these parts, and dissipates the midnight hours at balls and all sorts of polite diversions, always—I should think—with his weather eye open to the main chance. Oh! he's a rising man, believe me. A few more years, my boy, and you'll see him with an income that would run a charity school. He knows the game, bedad, and will play it for all it's worth. Now let's go and have that drink!"

As they chatted in a secluded corner of the hotel's

comfortable smoking-room, Sheldon enlarged on the advancement of Temple.

"They say he'll touch politics next general election, and some day you'll see him Attorney-General and wearing silk. Man alive! he's a cold, keen blade! Sure, if I'd half his wits, and could drop my little weaknesses into the harbour, rolled up in a neat little bundle with my blessing, I wouldn't be where I am. Touch the bell, my boy."

"I'm going to take him back for the vacation, if I can persuade him to come. The change to the mountains from the moist heat down here will pull him together. Do you know, Sheldon, what you say is just what I would expect, knowing his people as well as I do. He was the only son of a mother, who was the most beautiful and the coldest woman I ever met. She was tall, and, I suppose you would call it classical in figure, with a singularly pale face, accentuated by a dark, deep-set pair of eyes. Her lips were of the thin, straight-cut order—altogether a severe type of womanhood. She always suggested 'duty' in capitals—Roman capitals—and 'heart' in the smallest of type, diamond is it, or pearl?"

"That's about it, Vaughan. He'll reach the top of the tree, and drop his heart on the way up. Sure, it's a burden at the best of times, and the ruin of old Ireland, God bless her, and bless her again for that same weakness! By the way, have you met my brother, Father Dermot?"

"Indeed I have, a dozen times or more. Why, he's the life of the place. It's as good as a benediction to see his jolly face!"

"True for ye! Maynooth doesn't turn out the like of him nowadays. When the family came over with the *Conqueror*—which happened to be the name of an emigrant ship in our family history—we left him, a bit of a gossoon, with my mother's second cousin, who had

an elegant shop ; and glory be to God ! he made a priest of him. It was the proud day for the old mother, rest her soul ! when he joined the family again. Begor ! she had a goose fattening for six months, till the poor creature could scarcely waddle. And the blessings she had from him, morning, noon, and night. Ah well ! she's under the sod now, poor soul. And so modest he is, man ! Why, he must have a power of learning, but he never mentions it. And the heart of the man, and the easy, Christian way he takes the world ! No scuffling with Dermot ; if there's a seat within six yards of him he'll be there sure enough, and rest, in a quiet, dignified, religious way. He's so humble he'd let a boy take his boots off, and bless him for doing it."

"He is certainly one of the most tolerant, kindly-hearted men I've ever met," asserted Vaughan. "He's Father Dermot to all alike, Catholic or Protestant. The whole place bubbles over with good humour when he's about. Know Father Dermot ? Why, who doesn't up our way ?"

"Have you any influence with the man at all ?"

"Well, I wouldn't care to say that, though we are the best of friends."

"Now, Vaughan, my boy, you'd do me a power of good if you'd just knock into him a few elementary facts of a practical kind. He once had a parish here—Strawberry Hills they called it—and the creatures keep writing to the man about their troubles. It's a troublesome place, and the father thinks the law is some sort of philanthropic craft, by which the poor but honest bootmaker gets his due from the sinner who forgets to pay for his boots—and the like of that, you know. Just touch the bell, my boy, and I'll take the loan of a match from you. Well, all this leads me the very devil of a life. He writes back

and says to the creatures, 'You must see my brother Dick, and he'll have the law on them.' What with wives about to add to their marital indiscretions simultaneously with being evicted for a trifle of rent overdue; and Mickeys and Patseys in trouble through the drop of drink; pursuing me as their sole means of salvation, life's not worth living, Vaughan! And it seems as though 'the more I drive them away, the more they come back. For the love of God, convince the man that I'm something like the Grand Llama, and only to be approached by an attorney, and not touched in the pocket, as I am daily, by the whole parish of Strawberry Hills."

Vaughan, with a hearty laugh at the Doctor's dilemma, promised to enlighten the father on the etiquette of the profession, and the fact that justice must be sought through the attorneys, stimulated by a due regard of costs, "out of pocket" and otherwise.

"That's a good fellow. You'll do me no end of a service. Just touch——"

"No more, Sheldon; I must look up Temple, but I'll see you again before I leave. Couldn't we make a night of it?"

"Well, there's a very diverting little play at the 'Royal'—remarkably pretty girls. You should see their legs twinkle, my boy—theatrical stars in a firmament of paint and book-muslin."

"Well, I'll see you about it again. Temple, you say, is in Tenterfield Chambers? Good-bye."

Temple, as it happened, was in Court, but Vaughan determined to wait for him, and settled down to the perusal of the daily paper in a luxurious leather chair.

These chambers were very different from the old den.

"By Jove!" commented Vaughan to himself, when, tiring of the newspaper, he strolled round examining the

well-lined walls. "A complete, or almost complete set of the Law Reports tells its tale. That was a dream of legal avarice a couple of years ago. Briefs too, not bad ones; twenty-five guineas. 'With you, Mr. Travers!' Good boy, Temple—good boy! I wonder where do I come in? Where is Susannah's career?"

At length Temple arrived with the quick, energetic manner of the busy man, who has regard to time; though to-day, as it happened, the further hearing of a case in which he was briefed having been postponed, he had a little unexpected leisure at command.

"Vaughan! What in the world brings you here? The last letter I had from you was dated after an exciting muster. It seems to suit you, old man; you look fit as a two-year-old. More morning dew than midnight oil, eh? All well on the station?"

"Well, Temple? Who could be otherwise in that glorious air?"

"And so you like it?"

"'Like' doesn't express it at all. It is a perfect life for a man content to live in the present."

"Ah!" ejaculated Temple, as with a shrewd, and amused glance at the other man's face, he settled himself comfortably at the writing-table.

"Sheldon—" began Vaughan.

"What! Have you been to see that dissipated old rascal?" queried Temple.

"Isn't that rather severe on the Doctor?"

"Not a bit. He's the laughing-stock of the place. You should hear him address a jury in the Criminal Court! Of all the inflated bombast! Yet—by Jove!—it goes down with the twelve good men and true. The unexpected virtues he finds in unmitigated blackguards, and the plausible excuses he makes for *unadulterated* guilt! Ye Gods!"

"Ah well! poor old Sheldon! He did me a good turn anyway. Do you remember those dreary first six months, who heartened us up? Why, if it hadn't been for Sheldon's sense of the laughter of things, I'm hanged if I wouldn't have died for the tears of them."

"Oh yes, he's a good-hearted fellow in his way. He sighs after a domestic heaven which will probably resolve itself into the concrete facts of penury and a large family."

"Yes! I suppose so. The large family is certainly a pull; one can't do more than amble with a dozen little hands on the reins. Still, to this do we all come, my Horatio. You'll marry some day, Temple."

"Doubtless, in the fulness of time. Take a cigar, you'll find a box in that corner. Here's a light. I hope, by the way, you're not going to make a fool of yourself that way—some angel of the bush with the torso of a milkmaid?"

"Well, not at present. Perhaps when the jam factory falls by the law of descent into the hands of the family, I may be able to carve a pottage of lentils out of that going concern, and so settle down and settle up—for the process will need to be twofold. It has always seemed to me to be—shall we call it ill-advised—of the Deity to provide so many avenues for spending money, and so few for making it."

"Are there so few after all?" said Temple sententiously.

"To my purblind eyes they are few, miserably few. I know all the copy-book maxims, Temple: you needn't quote them; and I know also of the Bulwer injunction concerning the bright lexicon of youth. 'Sandford and Merton' have I read; and much wisdom have I gathered at the feet of spinster aunts. All the same, the said avenues are relatively few to me."

"But out of the mouths of even spinster aunts may come

wisdom. Do you know, Vaughan," and he picked up a paper-knife and tapped it meditatively on the table, "what little success I have had in life I owe to my mother."

"That's a platitude in Scotland; but you're not Scotch."

"As it happened she was Scotch, and the financial side of the race was in her developed out of proportion to its metaphysical. Being her only child, and born late in life, as I grew to manhood she made a close companion of me. In intellect my father, though a man of some literary gift, could not compare with her. At one point alone they met on common ground. They were broad in religious matters, and as a consequence, my youthful imagination was spared the hotch-potch of 'revealed truth,' as it was called in those days. The 'pater' was a man of every one's affairs but his own, of many schemes and few attainments; and had it not been for the mastery and cool judgment of my mother in these later days, even what is left of the family fortune would have vanished. The greater part of the vacations, when home from Oxford, I spent in my mother's company. She was a wiry woman, though well past middle age at the time; and often we made up walking trips to the 'Lake' district, Wales, or the South of England. In the discussions by road and field, we came into closer mental touch with each other than perhaps one son in a hundred ever gets with either parent. Had she been a dreamy sensuous woman, I might have petered out my life following some emotional 'will-o'-the-wisp' poetry, fiction of the amorphous order, impressionist art, or the like. Fortunately it was otherwise. She was almost abnormally free from the emotional mist which distorts the average woman's view of life. Those were the days when Darwin, Lyell, Huxley, and the rest of the apostles of the new genesis were still stirring the dovecots of the orthodox;

and she took a keen interest in the conflict. The facts of life were full of interest to her, and many a time in our rambles she would stop to point out some little incident in the universal strife about our feet, and convert it into an application to human life. She held, and rightly so, that with concentration on a fixed object, the average healthy man, with the everyday chances of life, could generally get what he wanted. Attainment came sooner or later, as the obstacles in the way were smaller or greater. To have to diverge continually from one's path to pick up the necessities of life is, perhaps of all, the greatest clog to progress ; and to avoid this she equipped me, on leaving Oxford, with a modest allowance. I remember distinctly the day she did so, and can recall her words—' It will maintain you decently, give you sufficient food, good clothing, and the tools of your trade, but it is not enough to tempt you. A man can make it the key of the world ; a fool would find it too small for a fool's needs ! ' It was certainly small, but with management it was sufficient. But all this family history is boring you ? ”

“ Not at all ; you are treating me with the privilege of a friend ; and your mother always interested me. To me she was so austere and remote that your familiar friendship was one of my youthful problems, if you'll pardon me for so candid a confession.”

“ I think she impressed many that way ; but to me she took the place of a religious ideal, and her views of life and commentaries on its affairs were to me so much gospel. Life to her without a fixed object was so much waste ; a knave with a definite plan would, I believe, have been more acceptable to her than a good man, rudderless. A practical, clear-cut motive was to her the necessary spur of life. The emotional field, she said, might be well left to the priest and the poet, neither of whom appealed to

her. To perpetuate the species, beget children, and nourish them as best as one could was, she held, the yoke placed by mother nature on the mass; but a yoke from which the individual could free himself, if he had but the wit to do so. As she put it, 'more genuine happiness was to be gained from gratified ambition than from any lust of passion.' Time after time she pointed out to me among our acquaintances, the wreckage caused by early marriage. Promising lives reduced to servitude, made trembling slaves of the market, holding out supplicating hands in the shadow of a dependent home."

Vaughan was conscious of a sense of humour at the didactic tone of the rising young barrister.

"She maintains," continued Temple, "that the encouragement of early marriages was the subtle device of a ruling class to keep the proletariat in subjection; and, by Jove! the conceit is not without its grain of truth! Just conceive, Vaughan, what could be done by a body of celibate labour with a fixed plan! It would administer a most unpleasant pill to the cut-and-dry political economist. In the multitude of Demos' children lies our safety. The children's cry for food is the lash across his back, and curse though he may, to it he must submit, and through it to us."

"Poor devil!" assented Vaughan. "Poor Demos of the olive branches."

"The child's sob in the silence curses deeper 'than the strong man in his wrath.'"

"It whips him up, God help him; how it must whip him up! I'm neither politician nor political economist, thank heaven! Have you seen the little, old-men babies of London town, Temple? However, that's neither here nor there. It's a great world, and God made it, so they say. Excuse my break in the disquisition—sweet are the uses of the 'stump'; go ahead."

"Well, they are the facts of life, and it is well to face them. Nothing is to be gained by living in a fool's paradise."

"Perhaps it is as good as any other paradise. You will pardon me for saying so, Temple, but life as you or your mother sketched it, does not strike home to me. Your pilgrim traverses a drought-stricken country on his highway to success. No cheerful inns by the way, no groups of romping children, or 'grannies' knitting in the corners of their homes—excuse the domestic poetry. Even your celibate man of toil fails to allure me. The hewer of wood coming home with the smell of griddle-cakes in his nose, and a little daughter trotting by his side,—well, it's not a bad picture after all. The wife's griddle-cake and the little one's chatter have a value, don't you know! I am one of—how many? Yes, I believe there were eleven of us, so the divine injunction to increase and multiply has been cheerfully obeyed in our family."

"That might be regarded as an instance of parental energy, doubtless. However, happiness, and I suppose that is the *summum bonum* of human life, is an individual matter, and perhaps some may attain it though eleven or more in family. But my training, as you will have seen, has set the goal elsewhere. That may be my misfortune, Vaughan," with a shrug of the shoulders, "but it is the way that it appeals to me. You know the possibilities of skill in 'whist'? Life is very like a rubber of whist. The rankest duffer may, by a stroke of luck, outscore a skilled player, and win the game; but in the long run skill prevails. Even skill, however, may waste itself if linked to a partner who discounts every point by throwing away two. Life is a game superlatively more exciting than any play of cards, and if you want to win you must know it through and through. What inconceivable folly then to tie one's

self for life to a partner who spoils the game at every turn. Look around you, Vaughan. What one of the women who pass you in a crowded, fashionable street, would you deliberately mate with? Think of the trumpery sordid cares of married life on a narrow income, so narrow that you are always in deadly fear of falling from it into the gulf of bankruptcy below. And its compensations, what are they? The gratification of passion? Love, affection, and the rest, what are they but occasional outbursts of emotion, to be promptly followed by a cheque!"

"Temple! that's rather—cheap, isn't it?" "Cynicism is mine,' saith the youth! It sounds like it."

"It may sound crude. Most truths put baldly do sound crude. Still, do not run away with the idea that I am a new sort of reformer who proposes to dispense with matrimony."

"I don't, old chap. You can't do it," said Vaughan.

"It is a useful institution—a recognised and highly respectable condition."

"Thanks," murmured Vaughan.

"And the pretty, well-dressed wife of a rising junior may in Society incline the ear of even a venerable judge to his more or less able pleadings."

"Oh, wise and upright judge! How much more elder art thou than thy looks," quoted Vaughan.

"Society entertains through the wife, so that at a stage of the game she plays her part. All that's admitted. Poorly dressed, with her peace of mind harassed by the price of chops, and with the ever-recurring baby as a gloomy background to her outlook on life, she is a dolorous burden; but in the midst of plenty, where the troubles of a menu are delegated to a staff of servants, where 'my lady' walks in dainty attire, and has the time and art to cultivate her natural gifts to captivate the senses of men,

well, she may be a great factor in success. When I can afford to do it, I shall marry. Life, too, runs out sooner or later, but a son may pick up the reins that fall from his father's nerveless fingers, and drive on. That's it, after all, Vaughan, to drive on."

"Yes, I believe that was the course adopted by the beggar on horseback."

"Well, after all, to drive on is the intoxication of life; and if some poor devils fall under the chariot wheels, what matter? They would fall sooner or later; and you, too, may come crashing to the ground. Still, so long as there is health in your body, clench your teeth, harden your heart, and drive on!"

"My dear fellow, I'm too fond of dalliance by the brooks and meadows of life to emulate your charioteering. I shall be content to see the dust of your wheels in the distance, if only you leave me to dawdle in the lush-grass and country air."

"Well, Shepherd of Arcadie, let us return to the world and think of things to eat and drink. You'll lunch with me, of course?"

"With all my bucolic appetite, if you promise me this. They want you to spend the long vacation at Woollawillie. Will you do it?"

"Thanks; it will be just the thing. I am run down a bit, and a few weeks in the hills will set me up."

After luncheon Temple returned to work, leaving Vaughan free for a long afternoon by the seaside, where he smoked many pipes, lazing in the sun, watching the passing vessels on the horizon line, and the broad-winged gulls flocking in white patches on the rocks below. He ruminated on many things, but chiefly his conversation with Temple.

"It's a right enough plan for success of its kind," he

grudgingly admitted; "but there is a not too sweet-smelling savour of the self-satisfied about it—and yet it is the self-satisfied one who so often comes out on top. Christian humility, on the other hand, generally lands one at the bottom. Yet what a life! Lord, what a life! The dust, the fever, and the tinsel god at the end of it all. Just to get on top, and then the One of the equal footstep, that incorruptible democrat, intervenes; and after him the coffin man, the king of spades, and *hic jacet!* So the curtain falls on the entertaining comedy of 'Success,' and the bass-viol is packed up in its green nightgown, and the crowd clatter off to bed. Queer old world, what fools you make of us! setting us by the nose to scent far-off divine events, that are to be accomplished by the accumulation of household goods and other uninteresting litter. Then, when it is a thing accomplished for what it may be worth, this conqueror of the world sits on a padded chair in a stuffy room, waiting for the raucous voice of the world's approval. Yet, poor fool, he might have sat out here on a rock and gazed at the sea—but he wouldn't understand, not he. 'The Creator requests the pleasure of Mr. Jones' company to view the treasures of His universe'; and Mr. Jones, in a dismal city office, preferring the treasures of his counting-house and Mrs. Jones' wonderful drawing-room, declines politely, and with an assumption of regret—for it is best not to offend the Deity. Let's go home. At least dinner to a keen appetite admits of no argument."

CHAPTER VI

THEY had ridden up from the foot of the ranges in the cool of the evening, reaching the homestead about supper-time; for it was customary on Sunday evening to close the day with a substantial meal provided from the remains of dinner. Before that event, however, the household assembled for family prayer, and this service had not been concluded when Temple and Vaughan left the stable after unsaddling the horses and turning them into the home-paddock. The scent of summer flowers was heavy in the warm air as they crossed the garden to the verandah, where the yellow light streamed through the open French doors. Deck chairs and rattan lounges strewed the wide floor space, and offered an irresistible invitation to rest. Temple, as he stretched himself on a cane lounge, gave a sigh of relief; for the hours in the saddle had cramped his limbs and tired him. As he rested, with the sense of complete enjoyment that comes after a day of exercise in the open air, the droning voice of "mother," the occasional shuffle of an uneasy worshipper, or the half-suppressed cough of another, drifted through the open doors.

The cantering hoofs of the horses and the barking of the dogs had announced their guest's arrival; but the call of hospitality was checked by the sacred duty. However, it was near its close. Vaughan, from the obscurity of a canvas chair drawn out of the direct path of the light, could see a scene made familiar to him since the first days of his life in the ranges. The father and mother knelt at the head of the table; Peter's head bent on clasped hands that

rested on the family Bible from which he had just been reading; next to him "mother," kneeling on a hassock, and resting her grey head on her hands. As Peter described it in the terms of the conventicle, she was "powerful in prayer"; and the quiet hours of her week-days were largely absorbed in the composition of this weekly petition.

The All-Father was very real and ever-present to the old couple, and no concern of their uneventful life was too petty to bring to His ear. When moved by the appeal of "mother" on behalf of the innumerable objects that had need of divine assistance—the cattle, the crops, and the "cocky" wandering in darkness, Peter would utter a sepulchral "Amen," that acted on his helpmate as the touch of the spur on a loitering nag.

Temple heard it with an amused, but not unsympathetic, ear. "Mother" had a sweet voice, and a simple directness of diction with scriptural colouring that disarmed criticism, even had he been inclined to criticise the childish prayer of this pure-souled old woman at the feet of her God. Each member of the family was prayed for in order, with a reference, if the family history warranted it, to his or her besetting sin. This evening, unconscious of the presence of strangers, for the young man's arrival had not in her absorption been noticed by her, "mother" went as usual through the children; asking that "our son George be brought into a right path of study, that he be not led astray by the false prophets of this world, who lay snares and pitfalls for the unwary." During the week Mary had come of age, and the occasion was one not to be missed in the weekly prayer. "Thou, O Lord, knowest our beloved child, Mary. For twenty-one years, Lord, she has been to us a true and loving daughter." ("Amen! Amen!" from Peter.) "Guide her steps into the path of

righteousness. Out of the loneliness and darkness that may hereafter, in the uncertainty of life, compass her about, let Thy Hand lead her back to light. Make her pure in life and thought, generous to the weary and heavy-laden, bountiful to the poor, merciful to all sinners who may stray from the narrow path that leads to Thee." When, as a corrective to the blessing upon the daughter, the mother had suggested that the hearts of her two younger sons might be purged from vain desires, and their eyes turned from the allurements of the world to higher things, the prayer came to an end. Then the worshippers, some heavy with sleep, and others sore as to their kneecaps, rose thankfully to their feet, and Vaughan handed over Temple to his host and hostess to receive the hearty welcome always extended to visitors at Woollawillie.

Temple was not a robust man; long bouts of sickness in early life had deprived him of the companionship of other lads, and the consequent results of such healthful associations. There had been too much book-learning, and too little sport in his early days. As a result, he was out of touch with life on the physical side, and to a large degree had grown self-centred. He was a better conversationalist in the drawing-room and a worse sportsman in the field than the average man. The moral effect of the rough and tumble of a public school was absent. A score or two of good drubbings in early life, the saving power of black eyes and sore head would have chastened the excess of egoism fostered in him by the influence of his mother. There was as a consequence of this want of early robust training, a trace of superciliousness in his attitude that, however it contributed to the public estimate of his ability, made the familiar intercourse of friendship difficult. On the other hand, he was a truthful, honourable man, to be trusted implicitly. Over women he exercised an attrac-

tion not at all warranted by an equivalent attraction on his part. He consequently piqued the feminine love of conquest. But there were other and more effectual traits of character that accounted for this attraction. He had the supreme belief of the unwhipped egoist in his own destiny. The spoils of the world were to be his; and this impression was left on the plastic mind of the woman, after a comparatively short acquaintance. On Mary, during this visit—the first of many—he produced an effect both attractive and repellent. She entered into the intellectual domain of the man's nature with a completeness that gratified her with the subtlest flattery. Temple had, in a large degree, the faculty found in the skilled examiner of drawing out a witness; the supreme art of adroitly suggesting something which the mind unconsciously resolved into its own idea. When in later days he held a foremost place in his profession, it was often said that in cross-examination no man could compare with him in leading a witness—and it might have been added, few were more merciless when the victim was finally trapped. This knowledge of the frailty of human nature, when delicately treated with the flattery of suggested deference, intensified the cynic element in the man. It was scarcely possible to place a high value on an article so malleable, so susceptible to the personal pronoun. "After all," he once remarked to a friend, "the world begins and ends with a capital I. The foundation of all communities of men is personal; and socialism, if attainable, must be a condition of equalised individual opportunities. Law is useful just so far as it secures a fair run for all competitors, and no further."

This first visit of Temple acted upon Mary as an intellectual tonic. Hitherto the emotional qualities of her nature had been developed beyond the intellectual, but

now the latter received an impetus. Both had travelled. During a twelvemonth's visit to the old country, she had sped so rapidly through the Continent, with its innumerable galleries of art, that they left only a blur of dull colour on the eye. Resting for a day or two in city after city, their distinctive types merged into a jumble of composite architecture. The bedazed mind looked back on the whole period of travel as a fantastic dream, associated with the catching of early trains and the eating of strange meats. He, on the other hand, had lived in these foreign centres, spending months in places she had only scampered through in a wild revel with a guide-book. Consequently, out of the shadows of her travel he built, with the solid knowledge of his own, something like a substantial fabric; the while drawing out her thoughts, and, when none existed, suggesting them, till she tingled with the gratification of self-appreciation. On the many rides through the surrounding hills and gullies they became admitted companions; and from travel their conversation led to debatable views of life: to matters of history and religion. In discussing the latter, Temple, possibly out of deference to the girl's environment, exercised a tact and discretion that raised no doubt in her mind that the Christian teaching was with him, as with her, the final word.

It was during this visit that Temple made acquaintance with Father Dermot Sheldon. After an early breakfast one Sunday morning, he and Mary, with Sheila and Vaughan, set out for a ride across country to Sandyford, the one-timed diggings where the good father's chapel and his modest home were situated. Their way took them down a spur of the ranges to an undulating country spreading out towards the coast, where the little port of Southsea made an outlet for the products of the rich volcanic deposit, as it appeared to be, which spread

between range and shore-line. Sandyford took its name from the crossing-place at a creek that wound round the base of a tableland. It was itself a contrast to the lower-lying agricultural lands, out of the heart of which rose two conical-shaped hills, heavily timbered with gum. In old days the course of the creek had been marked by clumps of wattle, making the air of early spring heavy with perfume. For the greater part these had disappeared, and the once green banks of the watercourse were now disfigured with shoals of tailings. In the days of the gold rush it had been blotched with hillocks of white, yellow, and red clay; and now, when deserted and grass-grown, they resembled a rifled graveyard. It was an amusement with the children of its few remaining families to drop stones down the black, square-sided shafts, from which the decaying timbers were being thrust inward by the earth pressure, and hear them clink from projection to projection till they fell far below through the intense darkness to the bottom. These shafts, with the mounds marking their mouths, were scattered on every side; some partly filled and others so deep and dark that, for all the eye could tell, they might go down to the centre of the earth. With the recklessness of young communities, where risk is treated lightly, no pains had been taken to fence about these death-pits. There is an element of romance in a deserted shaft; and imagination associates tales of fortune, death, and of crime with these melancholy graves of departed hope.

Sandyford, as a diggings, had never got far beyond the tent stage. Things "panned out" too soon to do more than create one straggling street, where a few houses, an hotel, and a store alone remained. The "Diggers' Rest" still displayed its weatherbeaten sign, and offered meagre entertainment to such men and beasts as might need its

shelter. The custom of the store depended almost wholly on the supplies needed by the "cockies" and farmers of the surrounding district. The centre of wealth had shifted lower down to the rich acres of potato land lying coast-ways, leaving the chapel isolated. Still, its weatherworn walls made a prominent mark on the landscape, standing as they did on the bit of tableland that partly circled the farms below, patched by squares of green and chocolate. On a clear, crisp Sunday morning the sharp metallic ring of its bell could be heard almost as far as the little port itself. To Mass came worshippers from the hills behind and the fields below; broad-shouldered, athletic settlers from bush clearings and potato farms, walking, driving, or riding. In many of the traps and carts could be seen groups of women, such as may be seen on any Sunday in rural Ireland; girls in straw hats and sun-bonnets; grannies in old-fashioned coal-scuttle bonnets, and a few with brightly-coloured shawls over their heads, and even in some few instances a short black "dudeen" between their lips. The girls sat straight as rushes, but the backs of the grannies were arched and their heads rested on withered hands, horny with years of toil. When the Woollawillie party arrived, Mass had commenced; and only browsing horses and ponies picking up such morsels of food as the limits of their tether allowed: the nondescript collection of vehicles, and a few boys acting as general caretakers, remained outside the chapel. Within, the congregation was drowsing and praying under the priestly offices of Father Dermot. The priest was happy among his people. It was a bit of the Motherland transplanted—but minus the landlord, and plus a prosperity and content foreign to Ireland. The old names, the same kindly, generous-hearted Mickeys and Patseys, Bridgets and Norahs, and the same beloved religion.

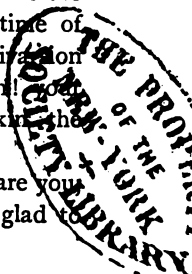
Tethering their horses to the split-rail fence that surrounded the chapel, the party quietly rested where, through the open door, they could see across the stretch of bowed heads the priest reciting the Mass at the little altar within the rails. The walls of the building were brightened by highly-coloured prints that marked the "Stations of the Cross." Though the surroundings were rude, and the worshippers men and women whose physical appearance bore the marks of heavy and continuous labour, the place and its occupants held a sense of dignity and reverence. They were all "their own men"; chapel and priest were maintained by their toil, and the children at their sides listened to the same Mass that had fallen on the ears of generation after generation of their race.

Mass ended, the worshippers filed out of the chapel to meet in friendly groups, and wait the reappearance of the father; for "a word with his Reverence" was an honour that all desired, and which he never failed to dispense.

Many of the folk were known to the girls and Vaughan, for, Protestants though they were, the free intercourse of bush life had to a great extent eliminated the bigotry that often marks the religious life of the city, where the classification of Christian sects is more rigidly defined.

"Bedad, Miss Mary," said an old body, who might have been anything from eighty years upward, "ye look as fresh as a daisy, it does my old eyes good to look at ye. Shure, it's many a foine boy whose heart you'll break! Make the most of your time, honey; lay up divarsion in the time of your youth, as the sayin' is, for faix, it's little divarsion ye'll get out of the ould man and the child. Och! you Riv'rence, and it's plazed I am to see you lookin' the pictur' of health, glory be to God!"

"Never better in my life, Mrs. M'Gee. How are you, Miss Mary, and you Sheila? Mr. Vaughan, I am glad to



see you and your friend. Sure, your name has gone before you, Mr. Temple; my brother in Sydney has written to me about you."

"Yes, I frequently see the Doctor in the Courts."

"He says some day you'll be a great lawyer entirely; when maybe poor Dick will be under the sod. Sure, he's a good-hearted soul, and has rescued many a sinner from the gallows. An' how do ye do, Molloy? It's a fine crop of praties I hear you're having the year. It's only the other day it was said in my hearing that Molloy's praties are as well known in Sydney as the Governor himself. And Mrs. O'Grady! Why, ma'am, ye look as young as your daughters, and fine strapping girls they are! What are the boys about at all at all, to let such wives go by them; but, there, there, it's weddings galore we'll be having by-and-by. Is that you, Macnamara; shure I wonder ye have the assurance to look me in the face after passing off two old fowls on my housekeeper for spring chickens."

"Throth, yer Riv'rence, they were the pick of the yard."

"Then it's not much of your yard I'm thinking, Mike; but send me another pair in their place, an' it's the last word I'll say about it. What! Mrs. O'Shane! Dear me, dear me; it's an age now since I had bit or sup with ye. There's not a woman in the country can compare with ye for potato cakes. The light hand at the making ye have, with the solid foundation of potato! Lightness in makin' and substance in 'atin', sure that's the perfection of cookery. I'll be makin' a pastoral visitation to ye next Thursday, ma'am, and if by chance there's a plate of hot brown potato cake on the hob, and a cup of your good strong tea handy, maybe I shall not refuse them. An' how's the wife, Doolan? What! twins again! Sure it's a proud man you must be! It's a great country we'd be entirely

if they were all like you, my man. Think of the patriarch ye'll be in your ould age. Mouths to feed, ye say? Well, and of course; sure ye didn't expect twins without mouths, did ye? But it's Mrs. Doolan, I'm thinkin', has more concern in that matter at present. Eh, ma'am? Is that you, O'Brien? What about that flitch of bacon you promised me? I like it streaky, Pat; and ye might put in a couple of dozen eggs while ye're about it. Bacon always goes better with its own eggs. Ah, Brady! you're the very man I want to see; an' good people, listen to me." Here the father raised his voice, and the group closed round him. "There's a matter of great concern to us all. Look at the chapel beyond there! It was pretty old for this country when I came here ten years ago, and it's so much the older now; and not a hand have ye laid to it all these years to keep it in good repair. There's yourself, for example, Brady, and you, Tom Donovan, and you, Driscoll, proud as ye are of your family. What has God done for you all? How many tons of potatoes have ye dug up out of His earth? How many pounds has He put in the bank for ye? Yet with all your fine homes, and your carpets and brass bedsteads, and pianos, what have you done for Him? Let His holy house fall into decay for the want of a few shingles. Why, the altar's as black as a crow, that ought to be as white as a dove. It's no more than a fortnight ago since I saw you, Brady, putting a fine coat of green paint on your door—and not a brushful o' paint for the altar. Ah! ah! it's fine music ye'll play on your pianos and concertinas on the Day of Judgment, I'm thinking! But maybe a drought will wake you up. It's then, when the praties are the size of pigeon's eggs, ye'll be thinking of your duty, and maybe then you'll cast a thought to your old chapel, with a roof like a sieve, and an altar like a

coal-box. It'll be the minor key ye'll play in then, my boys! Now look ye, I expect a new roof on the chapel, and the whole inside done up in a way that'll reflect credit on you and me, and be pleasing in the sight of the Almighty, sweet and clean and weather-tight; and the women can make a new altar-cloth when the winter sets in. Maybe it's because ye have a priest that's too free and easy with you that ye neglect these things; but I'll be taking myself to task some of these days, and it's then ye'll wake up. Sure it's the hard man ye'll find me then; more penance and less blessing ye'll get, mark my words!"

"Oh! go on with ye, father; sure you wouldn't have us believe that. It's the tender heart ye have, my dear!" said an old body; and the flock murmured an appreciative chorus of "God bless him ava!" "It's the big heart he has!" and so on. Then in the plenitude of their promises, which is greater than the Hibernian gift of performance, they declared by all the saints that the chapel should be so adorned and decorated, and made altogether water-tight and beautiful, that the father would be a proud man entirely; and with much shaking of hands and protestations of goodwill, the congregation dispersed, on foot, on horse, and in traps, till only the priest and his guests were left.

"We are going to storm the larder," said Vaughan.

"Well, bedad, ye'll have to settle that with old Bridget. Look at her standing at the door like a she-dragon. Soother her down, Sheila, my child. It's the dinner's cold, or the cabbage too watery, or the pudding done to a cinder, or the cat has got her nose in the cream and broken a jug—it would be a poor world that hadn't something wrong with it for Bridget. Soother her down Sheila, my child, soother her down."

Sheila went in advance to mollify the household dragon,

and retired with her to the kitchen, in the midst of a high-pitched protest on the part of Bridget. But it turned out after all that the dragon was a very harmless one. Mary joined her and Sheila in the kitchen, and in half-an-hour's time, with the aid of tinned meat and a plentiful supply of potatoes, baked in their jackets, an ample meal was provided.

Father Dermot was in his element, as, at the head of his little table—so crowded that there was barely room for the plates and their viands—he pressed this and that in turn upon his guests. Temple looked in despair at the piled-up food before him; but with a good appetite he attacked it vigorously, warding off from time to time the attempts of his host to add another slice, or a potato cooked to a turn, with its mealy whiteness cracking through the tight brown skin.

It was a merry meal; and even the "dragon," as she ministered to their wants in the way of clean plates and so on, softened in countenance, and, with the freedom of long service, joined in the conversation. The father told delightful anecdotes, and set every one at ease. To Temple this atmosphere of bubbling fun, laughter, and unconventional freedom, was like a breath of new life. He ate more than perhaps he had ever done in the course of his life. They had, after the custom of the colonies, tea with the meal; though later the father produced some whisky for the men, with an expression of regret that it wasn't the weather for punch.

"It was always the custom in my uncle's house," said he, "to mix a bowl of punch after dinner on Sunday; he would ladle out a wineglassful, and hand it to my aunt, and then solemnly bow to the poor soul. Then she would go off to the parlour with her thimbleful, leaving us to finish the bowl and smoke our pipes. Wish! but it

was a funny little parlour. The carpet had red roses on it twice as big as your hat; and the crotchet-work mats on the back of the chairs, and the shade of paper flowers, and the framed sampler on the wall, and the 'Prodigal Son' in wool-work, with brown legs, a sheepskin and long hair, and a pig in the background. Then there was a black, horse-hair sofa, that was as about as aisy as purgatory, and as slippery as a horse factor's conscience. Then there was a glass shade with a stuffed canary on a twig, and a round table with books of the poets, which none ever read, laid out at mathematical distances, like so many plates. Soul alive! how I remember it. And there she sat in her Sunday 'duds,' sipping her trifle of punch, and feeling as grand as the Lord-Lieutenant."

And so, with chatter and reminiscence, the meal came to an end at last; and soon after the father had to saddle his nag, and, after a warm farewell, rode off to Portsea for Vespers.

The afternoon was well advanced when the Woollawillie party started homeward; and Temple, influenced by the genial companionship of the day, found himself chatting with the unreserve of licensed friendship to the woman who rode at his side. That night, as he sat smoking on the verandah of the old homestead, looking across the hills touched with the mystery of moonlight, he wondered whether his mother's plan of life was really all-sufficient; if indeed any scheme of life could be complete from which the woman was excluded.

CHAPTER VII

It was late, and he was tired. The traffic in the streets had ceased, and all the chambers in the building, save his, were silent and dark. Only in Temple's room was a light burning. As he lay back in a chair, resting with clasped hands behind his head, the silence oppressed him. Now and then a rat scampered along the corridor, or rustled in the paper litter collected by the caretaker in her sweeping. Once a door banged in the upper storey, giving his over-taxed nerves a shock. Whilst the concentration of work lasted, solitude was unthought of; but now, with the mind relaxed, it closed about him like a vapour. To break the sense of it he rose and stretched himself, with a long, weary yawn, then lighting his pipe, paced up and down the room, in and out of the circle of light cast by the shaded lamp on the carpet.

It was now eight years since Temple had been called to the Bar, and six of these had been spent in strenuous toil in the city of his adoption. They had been fruitful years in work and clients. Already he had passed the first thousand of annual income, and the second was within realisation. To the gift of advocacy, the lucid placing of facts, the cold, dry reasoning from well-established premises, the skill of the examiner who knows what to extract and what to leave scrupulously—or unscrupulously—alone, he added the subtle skill and learning of the pleader.

Two years ago he had contested the election to a city constituency, and had won a seat in the Assembly of the

local Parliament. At present, he was in Opposition, and a thorn in the side of a Ministry whose power was on the wane. He could scarcely be called popular in the House, but he had an incisive, logical manner of debate that won him respect, and made him a man to be reckoned with. Interruption, "chaff," and the rather rough-and-ready methods of the popular Chamber, representing as it did in a very complete sense the various classes of life and interest in the community, were not altogether pleasing to him. Fighting with the political bludgeon was not perhaps the style of combat he would have chosen. The Law Courts were more to his taste, but John Temple knew enough of his world to realise that its prizes were to the thick-skinned, that place and power were to be clutched by the strongest hand. It was no place for a thin-skinned man. To be finnick and over-nice was to be hustled to the outskirts. There was, however, an element in Temple's character which threatened to obstruct his way in politics. Whilst conscious of it, he was never able to eliminate it from his life. The independence of judgment which had been so fully cultivated in his youth, carrying him at times into extreme radicalism, made him chafe against party loyalty in any absolute sense. He saw clearly enough that it was essential to success in politics; that in itself, apart from personal ability, it was the merit of merits in the man who looked to place and power, and yet, he could never wholly bend his neck to the yoke. He was a victim to the rational conscience, an inner loyalty to what he believed to be demonstrably true. The half-way house of expediency was not a shelter in which he could rest satisfied. On the other hand, the alternative of isolation meant political death, and this he so fully recognised that he was tempted to adopt a policy of silent acquiescence in measures, the policy of which was repug-

nant to his rational conscience. Temple, as a politician, lacked the strength of unreserved loyalty.

He had his lapses into very common humanity. Such a lapse he had to-night. Since the first visit to Woollawillie he had spent every long vacation but one (when the parliamentary and legal vacations failed to coincide) with the Rowe family, and consequently had been much in the society of Mary. Away from the restraint of professional duty, he had almost imperceptibly drifted into an intimacy with the girl that had no parallel in his life. It had nothing in common with that one other intimacy, on a different plane, which had been created in his boyhood by a mother's ambition. He it was who now drew the plan of life, not in the severe lines of the original architect, but in artistic colours that filled the girl's imagination with the glow of romance. He afterwards looked back on those days of holiday-making on the station as cameos cut from a life apart.

To Mary the visits had been epochs. Time marked its progress by the coming and going of John Temple. He supplied the place of an intellectual force in her life. The concentration of work to a given end, the undaunted persistency of his nature, the determination to acknowledge no obstacle in the path before it, had a fascination for her. How infinitely poor the aimless days of the men about her seemed when set side by side with this resolute nature! Poor Jim, with never a thought beyond the multiplication of cattle, or the fortunes of the changing seasons, how poor a figure he cut—physical giant as he was—beside this white-handed, delicate-faced man, with his plan of assault upon the City of Success—the city that lay shimmering in the distance, with the glitter of the world's riches.

Mary enjoyed almost perfect physical health; red blood

flowed in every vein ; and she had gifts of intellect that, finding little material for their exercise in the monotony of the daily round of household duties, served rather to stimulate the imagination than to promote any practical end.

Consequently, Temple, with his clearly defined purpose, upon the accomplishment of which the whole of his powers were concentrated, had for her the attraction that such a character needs must have to one of perhaps equal gifts, seeking a point of centralisation. He focussed life to her.

To supplement such a nature as Temple's, to assist, in however minor a capacity, in winning a way with him to a seat among the mighty, to see the world clamouring round the base of the hill up whose steep side they had fought hand in hand, was a dream that intoxicated her girlish imagination. Of love for this man, love in the simple sense of the old couple who had trudged the dusty way of life, with no ambition beyond that which circled the fireside of home, she now never stayed to question. To be with him, to work with him, was to live—to live in the rich, florid sense of youth, and to live thus must be to love. The milestones of life stretched illimitably before her, and led ever upward. Step by step they would travel, till in the mist of years she saw him, it might be at the head of the great United States of the continent, but in any event a place of power and dignity. Temple had said that some day this union would assuredly come about, and the conception and its possibilities had seized on her.

Temple, in the silence of his chambers, weighed and balanced the question of marriage, much as he might have weighed and balanced the odds for and against a client in a suit at law. He had no mind to cumber himself with a wife and household goods, if there were no resulting material benefits. To indulge in the doubtful luxury of an expensive establishment that advanced his purpose not

one step, would be midsummer madness. If, on the other hand, marriage could be made to advance it, then the risk might be taken. An attractive wife, capable, intelligent, and physically sound, who could make the social running for him that often led to tangible benefits well worth their cost, was one thing; the privilege of maintaining a private hospital, as half-a-dozen men he could name were doing, was another and a very different matter. A son he must have; that was settled; as to the rest, well, the fewer the better. Then, the son must be no puny youngster, heir to the neurotic temperament of a nervous, excitable hothouse creature, but the child of a woman fit to bear children. Such a son as a man might rejoice in—sound, fit, capable. But capacity as a mother was not all; she must be a woman of intelligence and with something of that art—it could be cultivated—of using the means of society for his ends. To a woman of quick wit and tact there was a world to be conquered. She would be a helpmate indeed. Hospitality, entertainment, they could be well used by such a woman.

He had met women by the score, pretty, vivacious creatures, delicate as Venetian glass, bloodless as fish, mere ganglions of nerves, playthings unfitted for maternity, featherheads whose ideas never reached beyond the latest modes, poor anæmic toys! He shuddered as he thought of a venture in that shallow sea. If he made a dive, at least he would head into decently deep water. Yes, she had all these possibilities of the wife he needed. What woman in all this city could compare with her in physical beauty, and what one rival her in keenness of wit, in sane common sense, the balance of things, the capacity of valuing them at their worth, and using them?

CHAPTER VIII

WHEN Peter Rowe came to the colony, with a meagre portion of some few hundred pounds, he brought with him his youngest sister Sarah, or, as she was familiarly called, "Sally." Now Sally was a sandy-haired, freckle-faced girl of considerable shrewdness, and when she united her life and little fortune with those of Robert Jenkins, then in the retail drapery business, she was far-seeing enough to estimate at its true value Bob's capacity for getting on in the world. The domestic economy of Sally's *menage* was only equalled by the thrift and business talent of her husband. The drapery shop became an emporium, and the emporium in time was enlarged into a warehouse of many storeys. Bob was no longer a draper, but an importer, and the family ceased to live over the shop, and dispensed hospitality from a fine house with a water-frontage, on the southern shore of the harbour. Sally promptly forgot her Sunday outings in a buggy drawn by one of the coursers who delivered parcels during the week, and sat stiffly on her carriage seat in what she conceived to be an attitude of seemly dignity. A surname of Bob's ancestors was resurrected, and the family blossomed into the "Cullingford - Jenkins'." Bob became to her Robert, and Sally was to him no longer Sally, but Sarah. There was, history relates, a certain Sarah, Duchess of Marlborough, who had an excellent eye for the main chance, so that even Sarah was a name not without social distinction and significance. Robert, in the fulness of time, when the assured success of his business permitted,

dabbled in politics, and by dint of diligent plodding in the interests of his party, and unswerving loyalty, became in due time a Minister of the Crown. One day her gracious Majesty, intent on the celebration of a birthday, raised her faithful servant in this outpost of the Empire to the dignity of a Knighthood of St. Michael and St. George. Lady Cullingford-Jenkins' first reception was attended by the pink of colonial society. Thus rose Sally from the parlour over the shop to the glory of a mansion at Pott's Point. Had Lady Cullingford-Jenkins been mindful of those old days, she had been wiser in her generation.

In a new country social distinctions are merged in a universal struggle for existence, and afterwards there is a certain intolerance of any attempt to re-establish an old-world order of precedence. The essential distinction is between the fortunate and the unfortunate; the successful few and the unsuccessful many. No one grudged Lady Jenkins her wealth or her title; but the assumption of social exclusiveness was another matter, and was the cause of many undignified shocks to her ladyship. Her English birth was a never-failing joy to her, and the youngest son of the family, Reginald Cullingford-Jenkins, was now completing his education at Cambridge, and was destined for a profession. Unfortunately the heir had been born over the shop, and educated at a local grammar-school. Ted, who was now Edward Cullingford-Jenkins, became an undistinguished partner in the business. But whatever may have been Lady Jenkins' weaknesses in a social way, she was unfailingly steadfast to her brother Peter. It is true that when referred to at Pott's Point, the reference conveyed a suggestion of vast tracts of country covered by unnumbered flocks and herds. Sarah, however, in her occasional letters to her brother, returned for the time being to the not unlovable Sally of the early days. Not

once or twice had the kind-hearted Sir Robert, at the suggestion—which was equal to a command—of his wife, tided Peter over a difficulty, and it was largely due to his financial backing that the old couple still remained in occupation of Woollawillie, and held the bank at bay.

The matrimonial exploitation of Mary was one of her ladyship's many enterprises. It was under her management that the trip to England was undertaken, after Mary's education at a fashionable boarding-school had been completed. It was to Aunt Sarah that she went annually for a vacation, accompanied on two or three occasions by her mother. The visits of the latter were, however, not regarded as an unmixed joy by her hostess, who had an emphatic opinion that poor Peter might have done better.

Lady Cullingford-Jenkins had 'verted to the Anglican Church about the emporium period, and the strongly-marked evangelicism of her sister-in-law was not altogether to her taste. Mary, however, was broadly liberal in her religious views, and prayed with equal devotion in church or chapel.

On these visits to her aunt, the girl had frequent opportunities of meeting Temple, who, in his quietly aggressive way, had worked into the social circle of people likely to be helpful to him. The persistence and self-assurance of the young man had been noted by Sir Robert, who saw in them the qualities that go to success in life, and not unfrequently he commented on him as a "coming man" in his profession and in politics. Temple consequently was on the good lady's list of men eligible for the hand of her niece.

It was Lady Cullingford-Jenkins' Thursday. One Thursday evening in the month was devoted to a "conversazione." Each of these gatherings was marked by some distinctive feature. This evening a collector of Leichhardt

relics was to exhibit a number of water-colour sketches, with notes of travel made prior to the explorer's adventure into the unknown wilderness, whence he never returned. These occasions, also, were not wholly confined to fashionable society. The hostess, among her many other ambitions, desired to pose as a patron of the arts, literature, and advancement of one kind and another,—such as the betterment of the condition of women; the conversion of the Solomon Islander (his gods and weapons made such interesting collections); the cultivation of the silk-worm by reduced ladies, and the like. This necessitated the introduction of some outer barbarians, more or less distinguished in their particular circles.

Mary enjoyed these informal gatherings more than the full-dress entertainments, when youth, beauty, and the dancing-man met in the spacious ballroom attached to the house. Human nature had more scope for play in the drawing-room. She entered with quiet amusement into the seriousness with which many of the guests took their hobbies. Every one was delightfully unreal. Aunt Sarah on these evenings excelled herself. She moved from group to group, steering her conversational course through infinite shoals and quicksands.

"My dear Miss Tarleton, thanks so much for the copy of your delightful pamphlet on 'Woman in Middle Age.'"

"'The Middle Ages,'" murmured the literary lady.

"Of course—'The Middle Ages.' So forcible, so beautifully put, so true, Miss Tarleton."

"I am so glad you appreciated it. What did you think of my little illustration of the Middle Ages as the cocoon which held the chrysalis of the modern woman, out of which she has escaped to spread her new-born wings to the blue altitudes?"

"'Blue altitudes' is distinctly good," remarked an

elderly bachelor. "As an epigrammatic description of a new order of feminine literature it is delightful."

"Perhaps," interposed a young man, "the world, I mean of course the mere man world, would have been content with the grub stage. Grub, you know, in the back-blocks sense of the word, is an essential, and the butterfly is a luxury—and sometimes rather promiscuous in sipping her sweets."

"You soulless creature!" said Miss Tarleton, tapping him playfully on the arm with her fan. "But you men are not to have it all your own way in the future. Some day we shall have the franchise: the women of the United States already demand it."

"Pardon me," said a pleasant-faced, comfortable-looking old lady; "did you say the 'united state' or the 'United States'? As an old inhabitant of the former, I disclaim any desire for the franchise."

"You married women are the real obstacle in the manumission of our sex," replied Miss Tarleton, with a deprecatory shrug of her shoulders.

"There's a dreadful lot of sand in the desert, when there isn't spinifex," said Mr. Topley, brooding over a water-colour; "miles and miles of it. I was once out Far West, and there was positively no end to it. I wonder why Leichhardt spelt his name with two h's; there doesn't appear to be any use for two, you know. I've always to spell the word in sections. I couldn't write 'double h' at a shot. Do you spell it in sections, Miss Wilkins?"

"Well, I will tell you a secret—I don't spell it at all—just run the pen along and then smudge."

"There's a man in town I know who has a typing-machine, a sort of writing piano. If that sort of thing becomes popular, some of us will have to return to dear old a, b, ab, won't we?"

"The charm of a water-colour sketch," said Mr. Higgins, running one hand lightly through his abundant side-locks, "is its spontaneity. It must be thrown off, as it were" (he accompanied the words with an airy gesture), "as it were with a stroke of the brush. It must be crisp—er—atmospheric—caught as it were on the—er—the—er—inspiration of the moment. Purity of tone, the master touch of certainty, and—er—there you are."

"Personally, Mr. Temple," said Lady Cullingford-Jenkins, "I know of no greater pleasure than to meet accredited representatives of English society. We have no society in the colonies, Mr. Temple. Every one goes everywhere, and you never know where you are. We sadly need traditions in these new countries. In dear England one cannot turn round without meeting a tradition. The effect on the rising generation will be appalling—they will be without traditions, without reverence for class or social position. The old patriarchal relations between master and man, where are they?"

"Yes, indeed," assented Temple, "where are they?" One had to say something.

"We have had the great advantage, Mr. Temple, of being born in the moral and intellectual atmosphere of antiquity. Do you know I once visited the Temple—your namesake—with its Norman architecture like an old-fashioned candle-extinguisher, and inside the Crusaders with their dear legs crossed—so significant of the devotion of those noble men to the Church. I wonder how many of us think of it when we cross our legs. Dear, dear 'Home,' with its oak carvings and family pictures, its squire and rustic, its tomb-stones and church-livings."

"Yes, it's a dear old place; but after all a coat of new

paint would not do some of our traditions any harm. At least, I venture to think so."

"I'm afraid colonial experience has somewhat tarnished your patriotism, Mr. Temple."

"Not a bit of it, my dear lady. I never loved old Mother England more truly; but not the less I pray that Heaven may keep her from dry-rot. Traditions, social, religious, and even commercial, you know, like old coats out of fashion and hung by, in time become moth-eaten and decay. But I'm monopolising you."

"No, my dear, I am not in sympathy with the new movement," said an old lady, in reply to a question by Mary; "but then, you see, I am a grey-haired body, and new enthusiasms take a deal of kindling in an old soul like mine. Then I am prejudiced. My dear old mother, dead now some thirty years, prejudiced me for all time, hopelessly, irretrievably; and as my husband says he likes me so, we are content to be an early century 'Darby and Joan,' quite lost in your later-day world."

"Tell me of your mother, if it will not pain you."

"My dear, it is too long ago to pain. She was the simplest creature you modern young folk could conceive, skilled only in simple household tasks. Her life was so charged with duties that they left room only for love, and that filled every vacant chink and corner. To her life was a very earnest thing—perhaps a little too earnest—and no question of the Creator's guidance or His supreme wisdom in the ordering of our ways disturbed her tranquil soul. God, husband, and little ones made up the trinity of her life—an old-fashioned life, that in my memory carries with it a scent of lavender and a sense of greyness—the grey life of motherhood, the quiet home-life of a Puritan stock. Believe me, my dear, when you are an old woman as I am now, you will find nothing sweeter

or better than the flowers that have blossomed by the wayside of the long, long road, from the seeds of love and charity—gathered in the garden of home—your hands have scattered as you passed on. Miss Mary, faith in my mother's trinity is the way to a true woman's Paradise, even to-day."

Temple, as the result of a slowly developing purpose, arrived at by a series of arguments for and against the matrimonial venture, had determined to risk a proposal that evening. The time was opportune, and it was easy to withdraw unnoticed from the room. The French windows, opening on the broad balcony that looked out on the moonlit harbour, were thrown open to admit the cool night air. Guests paced the broad tiled way for a while, welcoming relief from the heat, gaslight, and babel of voices. At one end of the balcony a flight of stone steps led to a lawn and terraced garden. By a descending pathway a broad rock was reached, sheltered by a Moreton Bay fig-tree, whose huge roots had spread, like the tentacles of an octopus, over the sandstone boulders, penetrating between their crevices into the earth beneath. Here a garden seat had been placed, facing the water, across which a myriad of twinkling lights marked the city. Below, the sea lapped against a curve of sandy beach. It was a favourite spot for young folk, impelled into amorous avowals by music, dancing, and a generous supper. Many a pledge had been given and taken under the old fig-tree. To-morrow, and its limitations of income—to-morrow, with the sparkle of romance exceedingly flat, and the commonplace contrast of an engagement facing one—was not then contemplated. They had their few hours of romance, and to-morrow paid. So many a time had Temple thought, as he noted flushed young faces and sparkling eyes meet, with as much composure as they

could assume, the lights of ball or drawing room. He would then remember the fig-tree, and pass on.

"Now," he reflected, "the fig-tree is to hear the same old platitudes once more. It must be either intensely bored or altogether sympathetic."

Having made up his mind to act, he was not the man to tarry. Mary had long since come to treat him as a familiar friend, and a stroll on the balcony, out of the chatter and glare, was refreshing.

"Let us go to the fig-tree," he suggested.

She assented, and they walked slowly down the path to where the shadow of the fig-tree was cast on the moonlit rock. A 'cello player of local celebrity was playing as they left the drawing-room, and the deep resonant notes quivered in the air as they sat in momentary silence on the secluded seat.

Mary looked dreamily out at the rippled path of silver on the water, the distant haze of the city with its spangled lights.

The 'cello gave place to a contralto voice singing the familiar setting of Poe's "Dream within a Dream." It started a train of thought in the girl's mind.

"That song goes back to my childhood. It is a haunting air, is it not?"

"Yes, 'We are such stuff as dreams are made on, and our little life is rounded with a sleep.'"

"After all, what would life be without its dream?" she said musingly.

"Does not that depend upon the dreamer? To some it is a stimulant, to others a narcotic. Don't you think so? One can imagine the case of a dreamer who wakens to action and is spurred on by the vividness of his dream-picture."

"He does not realise it as a dream?"

"Yes, he realises it, but seeks to convert it into the terms of fact."

"You have your dream, too?"

"You see it before you. There it is lying in the lights of the city. Only a few years ago, as time is counted in the older world, that city was a rude military camp; to-day it is the greatest port of the southern world; to-morrow it will be the mother-city of the united states of a great continent—the right hand of the Empire. It is a far-reaching dream, reaching beyond the span of our lives. Perhaps some day, when the old Mother of Nations is in decay (for decay will come sooner or later), or it may be when her power is challenged by a rival, she may renew her strength from these young cities, planted by her adventurous children, and again hold the world in check. That is a dream capable of realisation."

"And it is your dream?"

"Mine shared with a multitude. Some are content to sit with folded hands, deeming it enough that they should dream and end at that; but others of us wish to see at least the dawn of realisation break before we lay our bones in the dust. Is it not worth a man's toil to say, when at last the day's work is over, and the sands of life run through his nerveless fingers, 'I have, in my brief day, helped to make a nation who will renew the blood of my race'? Some day, believe me—for it may be in our time, who knows—you will see this harbour before us covered with the fleets of the 'old world' gathered to do honour to the union of Australia. To see that brought about, to take some part in the realisation of this hope, this dream, is it not worth the striving for?"

"It is worth a life's work."

"Then will you share it with me, Mary—share my hope, my ambition? Will you let it be our life work?"

"But what could a woman do in that galley?"

"What could she not do if her soul were set on it? What rough places could not her hand make smooth? What opportunities could she not create? Mary, I offer you the greatest gift a man can offer a woman—a place, a real place, a helpful place in his life. I ask you to help me to a great end, to join hands with me in a life's enterprise. Will you take it?"

There was a momentary silence before she replied in a low voice: "Will you let me think for a minute—and alone, please?"

He went down the rough steps cut in the rock to the beach below.

Left alone, she tried to concentrate her thoughts, to see clearly whither she was going. Memory carried her swiftly back to the one other offer of marriage she had received in her life. It was a declaration of love, impetuous, passionate; this had no note, no word of love; it was an offer of companionship—intellectual companionship, it is true—but—but— She gave a little shiver. It was cold as a crystal; but had it not all its beauty too? How it fascinated one! to rise step by step in wealth and power, to reach at last that golden day when perhaps he, and she at his side, would stand at the head of a federated people. The glitter, the colour, the enthusiasm of it filled her young brain; and love—surely it also would be there, the comradeship of wedded life, the still closer companionship in a shared ambition, in a splendid hope, a dream of national life! It must be there. It would come some day when for a little time the dream ceased to possess him, and he held out his arms to her, no longer partner in his work, but the woman he loved. Surely God would send them love when little faces were pressed close to theirs. After this she could not go back to the hills. The light of life

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was in her eyes, the blood of strenuous living filled her veins.

Then a figure arose against the moonlight. He had returned for his answer.

She went to him and placed her hands in his.

CHAPTER IX

WHEN Mary returned to Woollawillie it was with a ring on her finger, the outward and visible sign that she had pledged her life to John Temple. She had carried the news to the old couple by word of mouth.

“Father, I am engaged to be married to John Temple. Mother——”

She was taken to the motherly bosom, where she had been nursed and crooned over in the days of infancy. A son is his mother's pride, but a daughter is her right hand. Sooner or later the son divides his life, and the mother becomes conscious that the key of her love unlocks one chamber only; but a daughter's life is undivided, and she holds a key to all—she thinks.

That they cried a little goes without saying; it is the feminine baptism of joy or trouble alike. It is only in heroic moments that a woman stays her tears—and heroic moments are few and far between.

Peter was well pleased; and with a fearful inward glance at a certain skeleton that had dwelt with him for many a day, he muttered a prayer of thankfulness.

Mother's congratulations were, however, withheld till she knew more of the matter. She wanted the assurance of assurance, and that could not yet be given.

Mary found herself in a new atmosphere. She was advanced to a place of distinction; even the boys treated her with a degree of deference, not usual with them in their dealings with girls. Visions of jolly trips to town, with Mary as an indulgent hostess, suggested present

diplomatic relations. George received the news with the phlegm of a philosopher; and Sheila in a carnival of excitement.

Jim came down from Glenfyne, chewing over certain flowing sentences that were to express a magnanimous regard for her wedded happiness, but his heart was not in it. It was a sore, almost bitter heart he carried with him along the winding track, and he called a rest at the Falls to brood moodily over the "happy event." But Jim was a man for all that he sometimes fell into the grievous sin of self-pity; and he plucked up heart of grace, and cantered on again, moulding and remoulding the gracious words of his offering. But he could not expel the picture of her face; it was with him all the way. It had been with him from childhood, and he could not banish it now at a word. There was no other woman in the wide world for him. How could this little lawyer chap, with his trim ways, his white hands, his city-bred air, love her as he did? He had a mind to damn him, but he pulled himself together to play the noble Roman according to his light. "Bless her wherever she goes," that was the burden of his lips, and he tried to shut out all thought but that.

But alas for Jim's flowing periods when finally they met! The tutored lips failed him. He scarce dared lift his eyes to her, lest the burning words from his heart slipped through the duty-tied lips. He bungled, was confused, inwardly cursed himself for an inexpressible ass, and muttered almost ungraciously the conventional congratulations. He had aimed at the chivalrous knight, and was but the boorish rustic. How differently the polished lawyer chap of the city would have done the thing! After all, perhaps, there was something in this city training; it could keep one's heart from blundering at one's lips, if it did nothing else.

It was a long ride and a lonesome one back to the station that night, but Jim faced it, despite the warm invitation to remain at Woollawillie. He was sick of himself, the world, the flesh, and almost of the devil ; but he found the last the most companionable to his thoughts in the gloom of this solitary ride through the bush at midnight.

The news spread rapidly, and amongst the first callers was Father Dermot. The father for years past had been, despite the particular shade of his ecclesiastical faith, a welcome guest of the Rows. Many years ago, Mrs. Rowe's sister had so far set at naught the training of her youth as to marry a young settler, an Irishman and a Roman Catholic. One child, Sheila, had been born of the union, and she had been reared in her mother's faith. Both parents died in her childhood, and she now dwelt with her aunt. For a time the families had stood apart. Neither of the Rows could at first pardon the act of treason to their creed ; but blood is thicker than any creed of priest or pastor, and in time the broken family link was reunited into an even stronger bond than it had been before. The result of the reunion was indirectly the growth of a broader charity in matters of faith. It was Sheila who first introduced the father to the household. When a little mite, rambling about on her pony, she had missed the home track late in the day, and but for the interposition of Providence in the person of Dermot and his ambling nag, she might have had to spend a night lost in the bush—an experience that suffices for a lifetime. So the father risked arriving late at Sandyford in order to pilot the young adventurer to Woollawillie, where she was staying at the time. The introduction was both informal and embarrassing.

"Auntie, this is Father Dermot—he's just a dear, and you must love him."

They found him equal to the description, and its consequent speedily followed.

"So then, Miss Mary," he said, on this winter afternoon, as he hitched his horse to a post of the side verandah, where she had come to greet him, "you are going to leave us. 'Comes a youth with flaunting feathers,' eh? and the old folk and the old friends sit at the stoop of the door in the twilight. Ochone! but it's all meetings and partings the world's made up of entirely. And I hope he's worthy of you, indeed I do. May God bless you, my child, and send you a happy home."

"With all the good wishes that are given me, father, I have no doubt of it. After all, a good wish is not far from a prayer, and we all agree as to the efficacy of prayer, don't we? But mother has a spare room ready for you. You must stay the night, and we'll sing the songs over just in the old way, so that we shall not forget. 'Dinna, dinna forget.'"

"Sure now, you're not throwing the Scotch in my face, Miss Mary. We've as good words in old Ireland as ever were coined in Highland or Lowland."

"And as warm hearts and as good whisky, father, eh?"

"True for ye, Miss Mary; but where's the mother?"

She was not far away; only in the kitchen, superintending the preparation of a great bowl of batter to be converted into brown and orange dappled pancakes for the father's meal. He had the appetite of a boy for pancakes.

The evening was spent with song, story, tobacco, and a moderate dispensation of punch, brewed from mother's supply of materials by the skilful hand of Dermot. Next morning, when bidding "good-bye" to the household, he called Mary aside, and put in her hands an old morocco-bound copy of the "Imitation."

"It's common ground to Catholic and Protestant," he explained, "and I thought you might value a thing like this that has a price of its own—a higher price than any man can pay—so there's richness for you. And it's been with me day and night for forty years—so there's antiquity for you. And it's got a voice of its own that is sweeter and better than ever a poor old priest can have—so there's a message for you. And I give it into your hands with a twist of my heart, for it's the long, long friends we've been—so there's a gift for you, my dear. There's just a weeny bit I copied out in my own hand on the fly-leaf. It's helped me—lame old dog that I am—over many a stile in life. Perhaps some day you may remember it. And now, God bless you and yours, and send you many happy years of life with a man that's worthy of you."

A quick grasp of the hand, a haze in the kindly eyes, and the priest was on his way homeward. When he had passed through the slip-rails of the paddock, with his broad back to the house, she opened the volume, and read, with a little intake of the breath that was half a sob, the words written in a crabbed hand: "For God weigheth more with how much love a man worketh, than how much he doeth. He doeth much that loveth much."

Vaughan, who had become a regular hand on the station, at a remuneration that would have been scornfully rejected by a foreman in Susannah's jam factory, had been away for some weeks taking to market a mob of store cattle to sell as "fats." On returning, he received the news without even the assumption of surprise. It was a contingency that of late he had come to regard as not too remote to be entertained. He had, however, a reserve of doubt as to its expediency, but that he kept strictly to himself. It furnished matter for meditation with his evening pipe, as he sprawled in his bunk, weary from trying to read the *Home*

News by the light of a guttering tallow candle. He hoped and he feared, but mostly he feared.

And "mother" in the depths of her heart found fear lurking there also. She recalled all the little noted traits of the child's life—the quick bursts of passion and equally impetuous repentance; the morning when, hearing the sound of sobbing at her bedroom door, she opened it to find a little white-clad mite nestling against it, sleepless the long night through, and crying piteously, "You do love me, mummy—oh! say you do!" She had punished the child the night before for a wilful act of disobedience, by saying that she no longer loved her. She never ventured on that form of punishment again. And as the child grew into girlhood, and then blossomed into a woman, time and again she noted the spirit that repelled control but yielded to affection. She had an obstinate independence of will that seemed to dominate her, and would dominate her till death, though many a time mother and child had knelt together asking for the divine help of conquest. But before the warmth of human love the persistent self melted like snow beneath the rays of sunlight. The mother had often trembled for the girl's future, if it should come about that this restraining element of life were denied her. And now she wondered and feared, and her heart, aching within her, longed for its assurance. "Where, O Father of all, where will she drift without it?" was the cry of the maternal heart.

As the brief respite of the engagement days drew to a close, gifts of all kinds, for the most part of little intrinsic value, but rich with kindly thought, poured on her. The insight they gave into many of the old selectors' conceptions of city life, its modes and fashions, vastly amused Temple, who snatched a few days from his busy life to visit his fiancée. One good body arrived with a parcel

of portentous size, conveyed to the house with an air of anticipation to be in due time gratified. It contained a marvellous patchwork quilt, beside which Joseph's coat would have paled its ineffectual fire. It was a composition in primary colours, and in design suggestive of all the books of Euclid. The old lady's eyes beamed with delight as she recounted the time devoted to its manufacture and enumerated the patches that went to its making. It was indeed an embarrassment of riches.

A venerable old grandmother, who spent her declining days at the fireside of a "cocky's" hut, knitted a pair of socks on speculation as to size, and as to thickness like a board—a present for Mary, to be conveyed to her husband on the marriage day.

Jim sent her a gift as rich—indeed a trifle richer—than his purse could bear—a jewelled horseshoe brooch made from Sandysford gold; and his mother supplemented it with an exquisite ring of Parisian design and manufacture from her own jewel-case, that contained many a precious trinket.

Finally, one morning she received a characteristic letter from Father Dermot to the effect that, at a meeting of the potato farmers, among whose wives and children the two girls had been frequent and welcome visitors, it was duly moved and carried that a ton of the finest "praties" should be delivered in Sydney, freight and all other charges duly paid, to whatsoever address she should forward as her future home. "My dear," wrote the father, "it went to my heart to suggest, even in as tender a fashion as I could fathom (for the like of their pride in potatoes you can't conceive), that a ton of potatoes to a family of two, with maybe a servant or so thrown in, was a big undertaking, not to mention the poverty of the city back-yards. After a long colloque together, the former resolution was

amended to read, that to the address aforesaid should be despatched by special messenger, on similar conditions to those recited, one dozen of the plumpest turkeys, plucked, and in all respects duly prepared for cooking, to be delivered in time for the marriage feast. I'll stake my reputation," added the father, "that your city friends never put tooth in better birds than they'll eat that day."

Mary laughed and cried, and blessed the kindly hearts of the people; and wrote notes and sent messages, and paid calls from morning till night. She had, as it happened, plenty of leisure; for her trousseau was being prepared in Sydney, under the superintendence and at the expense of her aunt Sarah.

At last the day came when she, her father and mother, and Sheila and Vaughan left Woollawillie for Sydney. On the way down to Glenmaggie, branching in on the track, came group after group of riders, men and women, to have a final shake of the hand, and give a cheery farewell.

As the track led past the cottage where the parson spent his leisure, they saw him standing with his mongrel pack by the wayside, a little bundle in his arms. They pulled up to greet him, and carrying the bundle to Mary, he lifted up a diminutive pug, with an enormous blue ribbon round his neck, tied in a bow that resembled a couple of fans projecting from behind the dog's ears. What time the parson spent in preparing that bow, no man knoweth.

"Thought you'd like the little fellow, Miss Mary—best blood in the colony. Good-bye. God bless you, and send you every happiness."

Mary nodded her thanks, and bending over the bright-eyed, moist-nosed doggie, added a diamond on his ear to the glory of the ribbon.

CHAPTER X

THE odds, in Sydney, are very much in favour of the bride being blessed with sunshine, even in the winter months. The world knows no better weather than a sunlit winter day in this southern capital.

Lady Cullingford-Jenkins' garden was filled with the perfume of violets and daphne, but its mistress was in no frame of mind for the enjoyment of nature. This was the great artistic event of her life. Upholsterers, florists, pastry-cooks, confectioners, not to mention the wine and spirit merchant, and the humble vendor of city cream, with many another purveyor of one kind and another, contributed to the feast and its decoration. The ballroom was gay with flags, and a long table stretched its length, laden with silver, crystal, and flowers. The twelve plump turkeys from "potato-land" had arrived and been cooked to a turn.

The bell-ringers had been specially retained for the customary peal; the entrance to the church itself was bowered in greenery. The juvenile "altos" and the rest of the nice little boys in nice white gowns, with a few of their elders to give volume to that Voice which had breathed over so many Edens that subsequently degenerated into kitchen-gardens, were also retained. The marriage service of the Anglican Church was printed in dainty booklets with blushing red capitals, conscious of sixteenth-century frankness. The guests were, for the most part, drawn from the exclusive circle of Aunt Sarah's

acquaintances, with a few of Temple's associates, and some others, such as Dr. Sheldon, who occasionally crossed, by right of professional status, the threshold of polite society. The doctor had been included in the list of guests at the special request of Mary. The Shah of Shahs could not have excelled this gentleman in the magnificence of his deportment. The exchequer must have been exhausted, and a loan floated to array him in his wedding garb. His hair was carefully parted in the middle, his incarnadined nose had, by some occult art, been modified to a peachy bloom; and a monocle, apparently gold-rimmed, adorned his right eye; an adjunct purely ornamental, for his sight was as keen as ever. Add to these items a high military collar, a lavender tie, a frock-coat, buttoned over a figure that curved where elderly male figures usually curve, grey check pants, and patent-leather boots, and as a final item a *bouttonnière* of virginal snowdrops, and the doctor's one great sartorial effort was complete. His devotion during the service was exemplary; and the after-feast had no reason to complain of his lack of attention.

Cabs and carriages arrived in a long procession, till the church was packed with a rustling congregation waiting the arrival of the bride and bridegroom. Whilst expectancy was in restraint, a professional gentleman in the organ-loft played plaintive music on the violin, terminated rather abruptly by the organist breaking into a triumphal march as the bride and her train of bridesmaids entered. Temple, groomed to his finger-tips, must, even in the cool depths of his temperament, have felt a touch of pride as he waited at the altar-rails for the beautiful creature, radiant in the sheen of her ivory-tinted robe, who advanced to meet him. There was the usual flutter, the craning of feminine necks, the whispers of admiration, and then the party, decorously disposed at the altar-rails, entered on

the ceremony that bound their lives in one for the years to come.

Of the silks and the jewels, the frills and the furbelows, of the minor characters in the set piece, the daily newspapers gave the ample description that befitted a wedding in society.

Then came the breakfast, with its list of formal toasts, and finally the departure of the newly-wed on their honeymoon. It was perhaps a pity, or maybe it was not, that the exuberant oratory of Ireland had no place in the speech-making. The doctor had to content himself with the decided impression made by his prodigal expenditure in dress, and a very warm and honest shake of the bride's hand. The turkey and the champagne indisposed him for professional duties during the remainder of the day, which he spent in a trip to Manly, where he communed with the sea, and excited the admiration of numerous nursemaids.

To a woman the honeymoon is twice blessed by a bounty of new dresses; to a man it is a new sort of holiday, with a new sort of companion, and hotel bills for two. "Fancy," remarked a commentator on this idyllic period of life, "fancy having to spend a month alone with a woman you don't know!" But this assumed a subsequent knowledge. Does a man ever know a woman? He is quite satisfied on the point before marriage; perhaps a doubt as to the completeness of the knowledge intrudes even into the honeymoon; but afterwards, year by year, the doubt hardens into a conviction of his ignorance. The dream of a young lover that, by some mysterious alchemy of the gods, two egos may become one and indivisible, disappears in the cold light that follows in the dawn of married life. God so made man and woman that in the depths of each the individual dwells alone. Happy are they to whom the surface of things presents such a

world of common life and thought that they may move in it still with the clasped hands of lovers.

Perhaps some suggestion of the individuality of life came to Temple and his young wife in these early married days. To the phlegmatic temperament of the man, with its dryly rational outlook on life, the emotional nature of the woman, with its warm enthusiasms, its erratic action governed from the heart for the most part, its quick perceptions leaping at conclusions without any intervening premisses, offered a contrast that seemed to defy the transmutation into harmony. The bond between them which had drawn their lives together was itself woven out of different strands. The ideal of success in life, with its resultant power, was the same to each in name only. To one it meant a place from which the destiny of a people might be guided, the current of national life set in some fixed direction ; to the other it was a place from which, in some vague, dream-like way, the sum of human happiness might be increased, the poor lifted to prosperity, the travail of the heavy-laden lightened, and the feet of the wanderer set in the right way. To the one, the power was political ; to the other, social ; to the one, it meant material progress for the whole ; to the other, the brightening of life to the individual. They viewed life so differently. Temple saw it in the light of the would-be statesman—of one who deals with life in the mass. If the individual went down, the weak life succumbed, biting the dust as the legions of the nation marched on ; what did it matter—so that victory came in the end ?

To her, as to the woman in all ages, the individual was everything ; what did conquest matter, if only a face could be lifted up and cleansed, and a weak body revived with food and set on the way again ? What were all the legions with their party cries, their banners, their watchwords ;

what was all the conquest of the world if it had to be gained by a charge over the bodies of the crippled, the unfit, the helpless woman, the stunted child?

He heard the song of the victorious; but she the wailing of the trampled creatures lying on the highway of progress. Being a woman, she had much heart, and the unfit appealed to her more than the victorious legion.

By the long sweep of the sea-shore, on the way to the towering pass with its chocolate road cut through groves of fern-tree and palm, on the look-out that opened up the panorama of densely-wooded hills sweeping down to green-patched farms that fringed the wind-piled sand-hills by the shore, they held companionship in these days of entrance to married life—but the companionship left each with a sense of incompleteness and isolation. Perhaps the man faced the fact squarely, and took it as in the essential nature of things. It was one of life's little ironies under a new aspect. But the woman hid it away and made believe that it was not so, and that some day they would see together, and be one in mind, heart, and soul.

CHAPTER XI

TEMPLE had spared no money on the establishment he had provided for his wife. It was not a large house, but was well situated, and stood in ample grounds for a residence of its class. Its appointments were in excellent taste, perhaps lacking a little in colour to eyes accustomed to the scale favoured by the pilgrim mothers of the colony, but recognised by its mistress as in accord with the more æsthetic ideas of their children. Still she would have liked to have taken a more direct part in the equipment of her home. The personal note was lost in the scheme of the professional decorator. In seeking her happiness, Temple, unskilled in the subtleties of affection, blundered on the wrong path. He had been a wiser lover had he discharged the tradesman and consulted his wife. To question a woman's taste, or pay it little regard, is a sin she finds it hard to forgive.

Mary had been accustomed in her own home to take such an active part in its management : had been trained in the practical school of the bush in so many household duties—such as cooking the meals, making her own dresses, and trimming her hats—that when relieved, not as a holiday respite, but as a permanent arrangement, from these tasks, she felt at first somewhat as a visitor to, rather than the mistress of, her own home. A stout and elderly cook held the kitchen as a fortress. She regarded her mistress in the light of an intruder. Mary made some preliminary overtures to her, but was repelled in a way that effectually banished any dream she had of a wife in a print dress

making delicious cakes for an appreciative husband in her own kitchen, or it might be singing out of the happiness of her heart in the warm sunlit place, with its dressers of plates and dishes, and all the homely necessary things among which she had moved in the old-fashioned homestead in the hills. If even she might have dusted things; but that was the duty of the housemaid, a pert, independent damsel whose deportment suggested giving notice on the slightest provocation. Surely the flowers would be left to her, but alas! the gardener was as much the dragon of the plants as cook was of the dishes. Certainly she filled the glasses and bowls with such of the garden's bounty as it pleased the gardener to bestow for that purpose; but it was different from the old home, where she had wandered daily in her sun-bonnet, snipping with the garden scissors the half-blown roses that scented the morning air, careful that too many buds should not be sacrificed, and mindful to prune the seed-pods lest the bush should be weakened by their ripening. How pleasant too it used to be to plunge the hand into the moist masses of dew-covered violet leaves, and pluck the straight stems with their purple-crowned and perfumed heads! Dear old home!

Temple was in chambers by ten o'clock, and the morning stretched out before her with uninviting monotony. Luncheon was a decorously doleful repast, taken in silence. Its only attraction was its speculative quality, so much depended on the mood of the cook. With the afternoon came calls, receptions, visits, tea, cakes, and artificial "small talk"; then the return of John, and dinner. They went frequently to dinner-parties, theatres, and social functions of one kind or another. When at home, Temple, soon after dinner (sooner and sooner as time went on), retired to his

study to work on briefs or read up some political matter that called for his attention. At first, in the early days, she entertained herself at the piano, but once or twice the quiet closing of a door hinted at distraction to the student; so a novel soon took the place of music. In the daring days of early married life she had sometimes joined her husband at his work, and waited with a little hopeful gleam in her heart to be called to enter into the vital interests of his life, but somehow the call never came. It is true that once or twice, by way of courtesy, she was asked to express an opinion on some matter of general interest, but she knew from the intent expression of his face that, when the hesitating, carefully concentrated opinion was given, it fell on ears that heeded not. The quick brain, with the nervously intense force behind it, was working out its own problem, independent of any aid that she could give. So, little by little, even the convention of entering his life faded away. He was ever a courteous, kindly husband; had she asked for more dresses, jewels, pleasures, she could have had them without a murmur—had them for the mere asking. But the things of the heart which were all to her, she could not bring herself to ask. Surely they should be hers by right of the wife; and heart-aching for the need of them, she yet hardened herself against the asking. Once or twice the forbidden thought came to her, even had she asked, were they there to give?

At first she used to wait up for him, long, solitary hours—wait till midnight passed, and the silence crept about her till her nerves were tense, and the least noise in the house set the strong white hand, that had held many a restless horse in check, trembling like a child's. One night she could bear it no longer, and broke in on Temple's seclusion. He was bent over the table, the

study lamp lighting a head that was already showing strands of grey in the dark hair. He raised himself as she entered, and stretched his arms wearily. She bent over him and kissed the pale, tired face. "Il-y-a toujours," said an old cynic commenting on his sex, "l'un qui embrasse, et l'autre qui tend la joue," but here it was the woman who kissed.

"Don't you think, my dear," said he, with unemotional precision of speech, "that it would be wiser if you went to bed earlier? It must be late."

"I was waiting for you, John."

"Is that essential?" he remarked dryly, turning his eyes again to the papers before him.

"John," and she turned to the lamp as if to lower it, "let us go—together."

But he glanced up at her with an amused look in his face, and gravely shook his head. Then, drawing her quietly down to him, he kissed her on the cheek and said, "Go to bed, Mary; I shall come when this is finished."

So she went up the silent staircase to their room with lagging feet and a heavy heart, for she knew that his work was more to him than she could ever be, and a stanza from a poem she had read passed through her mind:—

"We walk along asunder,
Our steps grow wider as the seasons creep."

Was this after all the part, the only part, she would fill in his life, to make a home for him? If indeed she, whose hands lay idle in her lap half the day, relieved of the womanly tasks to which they had been trained, could be said to make anything?

Mary, the tonic of life being withdrawn, became introspective and a little morbid. She, who had dreamed of

the new life as one of increased activities, found it the reverse. For a year the novelty held the restless, unsatisfied spirit in check, but the second year matured novelty into custom, and the stage of monotony was entered. With monotony, the undercurrent of her life, the unsatisfied craving for the warmth and glow of an affection that was absent from it, intensified. She attempted the hopeless task of self-analysis, and, seeking for the passion denied her, became whimsical, variable, mutable. The phlegm of Temple, with his set purpose flowing like a river between fixed banks, served now to irritate, and not, as she had hoped, to enthrall her. She had contemplated absorption in an ambition, but found herself only an idle speculator at a game whose rules were mysteries, whose meaning she guessed at obscurely. The frequent references in newspapers to her husband in his profession and in politics had a passing interest to her, but the picturesque element of her dreams was lacking in them. The revelations that came to her from time to time in the occasional confidences of her husband, as to the means by which place and power are won, repelled her. The glamour that the enthusiasm of early years throws over life was being dispelled; its facts loomed up ugly and uninviting. The "sweet-scented manuscript of youth" was closing. Temple, in his impassive courtesy, offered her little opportunity for offence, and yet she sought offence. If only he had been less coldly considerate for her she would have been less dissatisfied—paradoxical as it appears. There were days when she longed for open strife. Her emotions sought an outlet. Afterwards she would look back on such days with a fear that self-control—the lesson, the oft-repeated lesson of her life—was leaving her, and that the nerves and hysteria of women she had once despised were claiming her also as their victim.

Temple might be learned in the law, but of the woman who walked at his side he knew nothing, and was too absorbed in his own ends to learn anything. He had brought a wife to his home, and so added a chattel—he believed a useful one, he knew a beautiful one—to his belongings. Only he omitted the human factor from the calculation.

In many wedded lives the door of happiness remains closed till little hands come with the key. Mary was now two years wedded, and she had borne no child to her husband. The fact became to her, without any clear conception of the why and wherefore, a cause of resentment. The woman in her rebelled against sterility. Younger wives than she nestled a little life in their arms. Why should she be childless? In her moods she would picture such a new life coming to her, would feel with the vividness of reality the soft baby face against her own, its body clasped against her bosom. Why was she childless? It seemed an insult to her capacity for motherhood, for who of these butterfly women could bear a stronger, fairer child than she?

Temple also regretted the fact. He had counted on a son—somehow the contingency of daughters escaped him—and so far that implied condition of the contract had been unfulfilled. No word of even suggested reproach escaped him. He noted—he could scarcely fail to do so—the change in his wife's attitude towards him, and attributed it to that fact. It was therefore with kindly consideration that once he suggested to her that she might take up some of the more or less attractive interests that occupied the time, and satisfied the sentiment, of many excellent ladies of their acquaintance. When, however, he came to sum them up the category of interests made but a short list. Art naturally took alphabetical precedence,

but Mary, to whom the word, as applied by the bulk of her acquaintances, connoted a libel upon the flowers of the field, or immense wastes of sandy beach, with an ultramarine middle-ground of ocean, broad effects that evaded the tyranny of draughtsmanship, shook her head decisively at this suggestion. Then Temple mentioned music; but Mary's standard of perfection surpassed all hope of attainment. The musician she bracketed with the poet—he was born, not made.

Temple pondered. How deucedly few they were, these interests of women! Eliminate the baby and the Bible—elementary interests—and you could number them on the fingers of one hand; if, indeed, they would score as many. Sport, athletics, exercise of some kind or another? Women were going in for that sort of thing nowadays, so far as the limitations of a Parisian bodice would permit. He suggested vaguely—the weakness of the position oppressed him — “tennis!” “Tennis,” repeated Mary, with the suspicion of a smile on her face, “tennis to minister to a mind diseased!” She intimated that tennis as an interest in life was circumscribed.

Then Temple in despair generalised.

“Find something to your liking, my dear, some congenial pursuit, and concentrate your attention on it, lock yourself up in it—that's the way to happiness in life. Excuse the sermon!”

“John!”—he had given her the opportunity—“John, has it ever occurred to you that one may be so locked up in one's own life as to cease to—to sympathise with the lives of others?”

“My dear, what is the object of law and politics if it is not, to use a hackneyed phrase, the consideration of ‘the greatest good of the greatest number’?”

“Ah, it is not that, John. Life is different to us

women. A general counts the dead on the battlefield. Each dead soldier is a unit in the calculation to him, but the unit means husband, son, brother to us. We are altogether personal, we women; we cannot grasp the conception of humanity in the mass. I wonder if you politicians will reckon on that, when some day you grant us women a vote in affairs!"

"That is a far off, and by way of courtesy let us say, a divine event toward which the male creation dubiously moves; and like most far off and divine events, is in the realm of speculation. What any given woman will do under any given set of circumstances who can say—priest, philosopher, or scientist?"

She was being drawn from her path, and fearful lest the opportunity should pass she abandoned generalisation, and made the appeal direct.

"John, you are my husband." He raised his eyebrows in assent to so obvious a proposition. "More than two years ago you opened the door of your life to me and said—it is easier to put it this way—said to me, 'Look in'; and the riches of the world were there, or I seemed to think they were—work, success, power, till my eyes were dazzled. Then we married, and the door you momentarily opened to me has been closed—closed ever since. It seems only yesterday that I ceased to beat at it, ceased to cry, 'Let me into your life, husband'—but since that yesterday I know that I can never enter it. John, John, it was all a mistake; there is only one, can be only one life common to a man and a woman. The man goes to his work, the woman to hers. It is not in work, it is not in interests, not even in companionship. It is simply in the love they bear one another. It is old-fashioned, simple, I know—of course I know—but it is true."

"You are frank, Mary, and it is only fair that I should

The Love Child

III

meet you with equal frankness. It was a mistake. You mistook your lover; you wanted the illusions, not the facts of life, and it is the facts you received. Your illusion would have lasted a summer, but facts live for all time. You have a well-kept home, money and to spare, dresses by the dozen, jewels, trinkets, and all the rest of a woman's wants and toys. These are facts, and I should think pleasing facts; still you are dissatisfied. I know you are; a few months after our marriage it began—it has intensified since. What do you want?—do you really know? I doubt it. You talk of love; well, what is love, if not the bestowal of these things on you? I have made you my wife, given you, to the best of my means, all that a woman can need."

"You have been most generous."

"Then what is it? What is this trouble all about, Mary? Now honestly," and he took her hands in his, "can you tell me in clear, intelligible words what it is you want?"

And she could not. It seemed so hopelessly weak to talk of love. He was good, generous, kind to her. What was it she wanted? Were not these things symbols of love?

"You are very good to me, John, very good, and it is foolish of me, dear. I will try not to forget it—I mean not to forget your goodness." Then she looked at him with timid appeal; she was bound to him for life, and life stretched far into the years. "John, do you think you could try to—to—like me just a little more? I mean to have me near you, to want me near you?"

"I can have you no nearer than in my house, can I, dear?"

"No—but that is not—not exactly what I mean;

perhaps I don't know myself what I do mean. A woman, John, feels things rather than thinks them."

"Mary," said he abruptly, "there is a cure for troubles, maladies of the imagination such as yours, and it is—I see you guess, though."

"If, John, if—"; and the vision of a child came to her.

CHAPTER XII

"OF poor Susannah it might be said," remarked Vaughan, as he sat, the evening of a hot summer day, upon the verandah at Woollawillie, an open letter in his hand, "that she truly moved in an atmosphere of sweetness. She had a nature as unadulterated as her own jam. What a conventional thing poetry is, to be sure! There is something essentially poetical in my mind between the association of the dear old girl with the jam factory, and yet in the form of the thing it's absurd. Take the fruit garden, for instance. How old Andrew Marvell twines his fancy round it:—

" 'Ripe apples drop about my head;
The luscious clusters of the vine
Upon my mouth do crush their wine.
The nectarine and curious peach
Into my hands themselves do reach.
Stumbling on melons, as I pass
Ensnared with flowers, I fall on grass.'

But once convert your apples and your peaches into jelly and jam, and the poet departs in high dudgeon."

"The factory intervenes," suggested Sheila, whose white dress gleamed ghost-like in the darkness. "Jam may have poetical possibilities, but the factory, never!"

"Why?" demanded Vaughan. "Why should the useful, necessary factory be excluded from the domain of the poets?"

"Now, Eric, why do you do it?" protested Sheila, "on such a hot night, too; as though one could answer a conundrum with the temperature at ninety, or thereabout."

"Poetic fancy appeals to one's melting moments. But

it is queer all the same, my dainty maiden. All art seems to me to be hard bound with conventions of one sort and another. Mother Nature is the only unconventional artist. You should hear her chorus at sunbreak in the scrub behind my hut. It would drive a *maestro* to distraction, and yet it is glorious music. The magpies' performance is incomparable. Then in that same old scrub at spring-time every bush is aflame with fire. Mother Nature doesn't trouble in the least, as you women do, whether the colours match or whether they don't. 'Yet Solomon in all his glory,' and the rest."

"Poor Susannah! From your description, Eric, she is pictured in my mind as a quakeress, elderly, prim, with a grey gown, in an atmosphere of raspberry."

"She was a good woman, mind you; and if I hadn't been of the spawn of Satan——"

"Don't call yourself such dreadful names!"

"Well, if I'd been worthy of her, poor lady, she might have been alive to-day."

"What on earth do you mean?"

"Well, you know, the gentle tending of a devoted husband might have prolonged her days."

"If Susannah really wanted a husband—and I doubt it—why couldn't she marry a man of her own age? I really believe you cared for her."

"Like her I certainly did, as every one who knew her did. Why, Sheila, if you had come under her influence you'd have been another woman."

"Perhaps I like myself as I am quite well enough, thank you. If you've nothing more interesting to say I think I'll go inside. At least uncle can be agreeable, though it is so hot."

"Maybe I have something else to say. Whether it is more interesting or not depends—well, it depends——"

"In your family it seems to me, Eric Vaughan, there has been a good deal too much dependence—on Susannah and the jam factory."

"There's a great deal in an established brand, even on a cattle station. Do you know what copyright is, Sheila?"

"The right to copy, I suppose."

"Oh no, it isn't. It's just the reverse, unless perhaps in the States. If, for example, I were to copyright you as an original production, that would give me an exclusive right to you."

"First of all, it seems to me, you've got to get your copyright in—the cool impertinence of it!—your original production."

"Think of what you owe me, Sheila. Think of the long hours I've spent in cultivating the garden of your mind! What brambles I've removed! What flowers I've replaced them with! Why, my dear, your mind is now a perfect Garden of Eden for two to wander in."

"The attraction about Eden to my mind was the simplicity of its housekeeping arrangements, and the absolute freedom of Eve."

"And to mine," said Eric, "the absence of the fashion plate. In my Eden, however, there are rows of beautiful shops outside the gate."

"Do you let your 'original production' wander outside the gate?"

"We all wander outside the gate some day; but those who have lived in Eden, even for a brief day, bear away some of the joy in their hearts."

"Eric, if you want to kneel, you had better go down on both knees and do it properly, though perhaps it's not quite so comfortable. What curly hair you've got! Mind the pin at the back of my dress."

"Susannah has made Eden possible for us, Sheila, my little sweetheart. Let me have my copyright."

And she let him have it, duly sealed.

The letter Vaughan had received informed him that the affairs in the estate of Susannah Pickford, deceased, having now been finally settled, a sum of seventy thousand pounds had been paid to his credit in a Sydney Bank.

What to do with their fortune when they were married was afterwards a frequent subject of conversation between the affianced couple. Sheila's financial ideas did not get beyond an elementary scheme of drawing it out by degrees, and spending it on things. Vaughan's got as far as investing the capital and living on the interest.

"But it doesn't seem to me," said Sheila sapiently, "that we get any nearer the real question, whether we live on the capital or the interest."

"It may possibly be of some importance to—er—others in the future," suggested Vaughan. "But suppose we do invest it, how are we going to use the income? You see, it will be quite a big sum anyway."

"Spending is quite easy—oh, quite easy," said Sheila, with a confident shake of the head.

"It is possible to live, as to love, 'not wisely, but too well.' Economy has at least this to be said in its favour, it leaves you with an appetite. Not to want more is to lose half the enjoyment of life."

"Well," replied Sheila, "I'd rather have all I want than want all I haven't got."

"What do you say to travel? Travel, they say, enlarges the mind, and its opportunities for spending are unlimited."

"Oh! that would be delightful, Eric. To see new places every day; think of it!"

"The newness of things gets very stale in time, sweetheart. A year of it, and you will want a fixed habitation

and a home. Folding one's tent like the Arabs, and silently stealing away by an early morning train, with an undigested breakfast to bear you company, becomes a weariness to the flesh."

"But think of the strange people and the strange customs! Oh! Eric, it would be delightful! We must travel!"

"Well, travel we shall, if only to find ultimate rest. But after that?"

"Well, after that of course we'll settle down. Oh yes, we'll settle down among our people—we are your people, you know—you've been one of us now for years."

"Equivalent to a lifetime in the colonies, eh? Well, I've no family calls. Susannah, most generous of women, has provided for the old folk. What shall we do?"

"Don't you think"—and Sheila put on an appearance of vast solemnity—"that we ought to try and do some good, you know, just for Susannah's sake?"

"Sweets to the sweet. My dear girl, doing good is about the hardest thing in the world. The probability is if you do good to A you will injure B. When a well-meaning woman puts her finger in the economic pie——"

"But ours won't be an economic pie."

"I beg your pardon, no woman's pie is economic. I did not mean the pie of domestic economy, but the political pie. Well, the woman generally blisters her fingers, and the pie suffers."

"After all, it's Susannah's money, and in a way it's a trust."

"Hum! Perhaps! My dear Sheila, doing good is a most tremendous business. When jesting Pilate queried, 'What is truth?' he might as aptly have asked 'What is doing good?' Fain would I do good but that I fear to do ill, sweetheart."

"And then you do nothing. I know what is good if you don't, Eric Vaughan?"

"In the bright lexicon of woman there is no such word as 'mistake.' Well, what scheme has my wise little woman of the hills in her head or her heart?"

"Now, Eric, if I tell you, you must be quite serious, and it is so difficult to get you serious."

"I shall be a very sphinx for gravity."

"Well," and she nestled close to him on the log where they were sitting after their ramble in the bush—a form of exercise to which they were much given at this period—"well, it is a perfectly lovely idea. Do you know, I think most people would be quite good if you could only—what do you call it when they vaccinate you?"

"Inoculate?"

"Yes, if you could inoculate them with goodness when they were quite young."

"But inoculation means a little dose to prevent a larger one."

"Well, I mean the other way about, you know."

"You catch them young, and you make them good. For the purposes of this argument then we'll eliminate heredity and original sin. Give the go-by to the theologian and scientist in short. Well?"

"If you remembered all your life through that once some one tried to make you happy, even for a little time, wouldn't that make you feel kinder to other people?"

"There's a world of doubt about that. But go on with the scheme, sweetheart."

"I'm sure Susannah would like it, if you don't."

"Perhaps I will like it in my heart, Sheila. It's my unfortunate head troubles me sometimes. Well?"

"Now, suppose somewhere we built a village like those villages you have told me about at home—your home."

"Call it our home—the Empire's home. That sounds well, at all events."

"I think it would be best in a flat place, don't you?"

"Oh! certainly, let it be in a flat place."

"Because then, you see, we could have a nice, broad street with trees on either side and a village green at the top."

"Don't forget the maypole and a village inn—we should certainly want a village inn—say the 'Red Lion'; red lions are indigenous to villages."

"No, we should have no inn, Eric. Let me see! we should have a coffee-house instead."

"Call it 'Wills', or better still, 'The Cocoa Tree.' Cocoa and coffee are both harmless, if not inspiring beverages."

"Then we would have on each side of the village street dear little cottages, six on each side."

"'Queen Anne in front and Mary Anne at the back,' to quote an architectural wit. Well?"

"Each little cottage would have its own garden."

"Climbing roses and sunflowers to be sure. Yes?"

"And then we should have a church, I think. It would be so nice to have an old church—we could make it look so old, you know—only——"

"Only what?"

"The people are so tiresome that way, they are so mixed."

"Oh! the one sauce and the many religions of our race."

"I don't understand, dear."

"It was a wicked Frenchman, my dear child; they have no religion in France, and sauce is a superficial luxury. What next?"

"Well, I would dearly like that church if we could get them to go to it—but I'm afraid they wouldn't."

"But you haven't told me who they are?"

"Why, the children, of course. How stupid you are!"

"The power of divination is with woman, not with mere man. The children of course; but—do you—do you think we'd want all—all those cottages?"

"Eric!"

"Perhaps we'd better begin at the beginning, dear. I'm afraid we—I—you—no, we, I mean—are all confused."

"The children I mean," said Sheila with dignified severity, "are the poor children in the hospitals—convalescents."

"Oh! now I understand."

"It takes you a long time to understand, Eric. No one could be plainer."

"No one could be less plain, sweetheart."

For a moment Sheila looked at him indignantly; then her face dimpled.

"Thank you! but you promised to be very serious. Well, only two or three. Now there must be no more nonsense. The poor wee mites! We should have a dear old motherly soul, like our 'mother,' in every cottage, with four children each and no more."

"A maternity company, limited; I see!"

"And we should give them such a time! We should have a recreation hall at the top of the green, with a fine floor for dancing, and a stage at the end for concerts and plays; and we should have a big waggon, like Cook's, you know, and you should drive them out every afternoon for little picnics. Wouldn't you like that, Eric?"

"As an occupation for one's declining years it might have its points, at least if there were no children on the box-seat, and a whisky and soda could be secreted somewhere about the person of the caravan."

"Oh! it would be lovely!"

"But it seems to me, Sheila, that in your schemes for the attainment of goodness, one would arrive, as it were, *per infortuniam*. To become good by the inoculation of the village, one would—that is, the child would—have to break an arm or a leg, or at least have the whooping-cough. What about the other unfortunates without misfortunes?"

"Well, we couldn't be universal, could we, Eric?"

"No. Susannah's endowment wouldn't go to that extent. Besides, to be universal is to be everything, and nothing in particular; and being a woman, you would want to be something in particular, wouldn't you?"

"Then let us do just what we can, and I think we could do that." And here a pleading face looked up at his as she nestled closer to him. "And don't you think, dear, that Susannah would be pleased."

"Assuming that it came to her celestial ears, I think she would." And Vaughan held her close to him, thankful for the tender heart of his sweetheart.

They were married by the parson in his church at Fassifern. Sheila would have no other clergyman. It was a very quiet, simple ceremony, and then they set out on their travels, to return a year hence.

CHAPTER XIII

FIVE years of married life had passed, and yet no child had been born to Temple. It was a disappointment, but he put it aside in the work of a busy life. His income increased; he was an acknowledged leader on the Common-law side; the silk of a Queen's Counsel was in view. In politics also he was making a mark. One night a long-lived ministry was defeated, as ministries frequently are, on a minor matter of administration. It was, for the political purpose of the hour, made a test of the strength of the parties. A vote of censure was moved. Temple enjoyed the sensation of the crisis. There was a nervous tension in the House that lifted it out of the hum-drum routine of every day. "Ayes to the right!" "Noes to the left!" A few minutes of concentrated excitement, then "The Ayes have it!" and the House broke into a simmer of eager conversation. The long-lived ministry was at an end.

Temple, a couple of days later, was offered a portfolio in the new administration, but declined it. It was sufficient for the present that the offer admitted his status in the House. He had his doubts of the stability of the incoming Ministry, and office in a weak administration did not tempt him.

Mary had fulfilled her part of the contract faithfully. She was an admirable hostess. The sympathetic faculty of tact, that in social life is the faith which removes mountains, was possessed by her in a large degree; but whilst overcoming difficulties, smoothing rough corners, and

conciliating antagonistic elements, she still retained her personality. The petty jealousies, the pervading selfishness of the life in which she moved, touched her only on the surface. The standard of life as a whole was perhaps lowered for her; its true proportions became evident; but beneath mean things she also saw a better part. The metal of humanity was not all brass or brummagem; it had its trace of gold. But the weariness of the life oppressed her; there was no home about it all, at least not in the sense of her childhood and her people. It takes generations of training to evolve the true woman of society out of the people, and she was of the first generation. Since her marriage she had never paid a visit to the homestead. She almost resolved never to do so. It would be home, of course, but she would see it with new eyes. The old, sweet content could never return to her—the content that Temple had banished with his dream of place and power.

“Art thou poor, yet hast thou golden slumbers, sweet content?”

She knew now that the fight in life was to the man; and home and maternity to the woman. They were laws of life, fixed, immutable; and a man's ambition could never take the place of a child in the life of a woman. The conception, too, of law as a fixed principle in the universe, had come to her almost of necessity in these years with Temple. The beneficent Providence, who guarded and guided the life of the individual, was being transmuted into a force that took no heed of the unit. It worked “red in tooth and claw,” heedless of life's ambitions, hopes, affections, thrusting aside all who crossed its path. God became dim, as law loomed terrible. When the problem of life vexed her, as it did increasingly, the craving for love intensified. If she could only place it all before some one,

even were he no wiser than herself, at least the luxury of sympathy would be hers. Women, she thought, are made that way; they cannot fight their battles out alone. There is no self-containment in them. She had often tried to brace herself to a talk with Temple about this inward trouble, but except with the surface things of life, the feeling of constraint, natural in his case, unnatural in hers, had gone on ever increasing, till now the effort was too much for her will—and yet she was no moral coward.

One afternoon she had promised to call for John at his club, but when she drove there after a wearying round of formal visits, she found that a Bill in which he was interested had, through the withdrawal of intermediate business, come on for second reading earlier than he had anticipated. He wished to speak on it, and so had returned to the House for the evening.

It was a winter's day, and closed in early. As the carriage drove through the streets with their lamps twinkling in the haze of approaching night, she saw the varied life of the city; boys, factory girls, clerks, and artisans hurrying home after the day's toil. She wondered listlessly what the life of this one was, what the life of that; what home they went to, even what views they might have of the eternal mystery.

For a few minutes the carriage was blocked opposite a pastry-cook's shop. Her wandering interest was caught by a little group of three: a woman with a large parcel in her arms, a girl, and a toddling boy. The allurements of the bun-shop was great to the youngsters, and the mother apparently could not persuade them to leave the brightly lit window where the tempting cakes were displayed. At last she went into the shop, put down her bundle, and fumbled in her pocket for a coin. She offered it to the shop-keeper, but seemingly it was not sufficient; and

replacing it she took up her burden and went out. The sudden quenching of the spark of hope was too much for the laddie; he sat down on the threshold and wept vigorously. The girl, longer schooled in the hard world of things one cannot have, tried to move him, but he would not budge. The unfortunate mother with the large parcel was helpless, and Mary could see the tired face look beseechingly at the hungry rebel, as she tried to coax him.

Mary left the carriage with a hurried direction to the coachman, and entering the shop, bought a bag of cakes.

"May I give him one?" she said, as the rebel suddenly checked his cries, and gazed, ox-eyed, at the goddess from the carriage who could purchase unlimited buns.

"He is very tiresome," the woman said; and with a touch of pride added, "if he had only waited till I had been paid for the work, I would have bought him some myself. But it is very kind of you all the same. Now, Johnnie, be a good boy, and thank the lady."

He received a bun, and his thanks were muttered from a full mouth. The patient sister had her reward also. The remainder Mary took with her; she did not want to accentuate the gift, for pride was one of the things she understood. As she bade them "good-bye," and was turning to leave, an impulse came to her—a touch of nature from the old days, a desire to help—and she asked the woman her name.

"Perhaps you might do some work for me, if you could find the time. Would you let me call? I love children," and her hand rested on the girl's shoulder.

Women convey thoughts by an occult telepathy. The woman with the bundle understood, and pitied the woman of the carriage. "Poor thing! she ain't got none of her own," was her mental note.

Mary obtained the address, and nodding pleasantly to her newly made friends, was driven home to dinner.

A week later she called at the home of her new acquaintances. A 'bus took her to the suburb named in the address, and by the aid of a friendly policeman she had no trouble in finding the street. It was a poor thoroughfare of mean terraces, depressingly monotonous. At a window of the house to which she had been directed she saw the woman of the bundle; her pale, care-lined face bent over her work, and too intent upon it to notice the visitor. When Mary knocked she opened the door to her with a constrained welcome, and a furtive look at the abandoned work, for time was very precious in this little household. The children, as it happened, were away from home. Mary produced some material she had brought to be made up, but after a few seconds of lingering scrutiny, the woman handed it back.

"It's too fine for me, lady. Making moles spoils the hands for the fine work you would want."

"How much do they give you for these?" asked Mary, taking up one of the rough, heavy garments in her hands.

"For ordinary 'colonials' we get about sixpence a pair, and for 'raised seams,' a little more. Then you've got to do pressing and taping, and find your own thread. It ain't too much, is it?"

"And how much does that mean in a week?"

"Oh! it may be ten shillings, or twelve sometimes. I've earned up to fifteen shillings, but that ain't often. It's poorly paid work at the best of times. Then there's rent to pay, and food and clothing."

"How do you manage it?"

"Oh! somehow," with another anxious look at the pile. "What we can't get we have to do without, you know. It's s'prising what you can do without when you've got to."

"Your husband?"

"Oh! he left me an' the kids long ago. I ain't seen the colour of his money for two years. I don't set much store on men from what I've seen of 'em. There's another lady as shares the house with me, an' a hokey-pokey I-talian in the basement. Don't you never eat hokey-pokey, ma'am—take my tip for it! Perhaps the other lady could do the work you want. Wish I could, for you don't look like one of them squeezing sort. Perhaps you'd like me to introduce you?"

"Thank you, I would."

She led the way up the narrow, dingy staircase to a room opening off a midway landing.

"Mrs. Clifford, here's a lady wants some work done that p'raps would suit you; and now 'good-bye,' ma'am, and thank you for thinking of me. I'm behind with my work, and there's the children's tea to get when they get home."

She put out her hand in the unaffected, independent, colonial way, and Mary took it in the same spirit of equality.

Mrs. Clifford was a different type of woman. Her bearing and the intonation of her voice suggested bygone days of refinement. There still remained traces of them in the arrangement of her one room, its scrupulous cleanliness, and the free admission of air, which, in the lower room, had been so rigorously excluded. There were a few flowers in a little vase, a print or two—not of the school of art popularised by the primary-coloured baker's calendar—and other evidences of more prosperous days.

Yes, she would undertake the work, and was thankful to have it. Work was hard to get at present. As a rule she made shirts for the factories. She was what they called an outworker. The shirts were made of flannel or Oxford shirting, but it was not a very profit-

able means of gaining a livelihood. She generally worked all day Sunday, for there were two lives to keep. On the Sunday evening she sometimes had a rest and a read if Phil were good. Other days she rose early, but Sunday was a late morning, and they slept till eight o'clock. Some week-nights she worked till midnight, but always till ten. No, the machine was not her own—it was hired. Once she had hoped to get her own by time-payment, but she could not keep the payments up, and so they took it away. She was just able to make ends meet. Allowing for meals and household tasks, she could make fifteen, or even sixteen shirts a week, and occasionally had pillow-slips to make at two shillings a dozen. Sometimes Phil was very trying, and took up a lot of precious time, but as a rule he was a very good boy, and remembered mother.

"Mum!" said a thin voice from the corner where the other window of the room looked on to the drab-coloured street.

"Yes, dear?"

"Who are you talking to?"

"A visitor, Phil. She has brought some work for mother."

Mary looked across the room to the corner whence the voice came.

"May I speak to him?"

"Certainly; he is a poor little half-starved creature, but mother does all she can for him, doesn't she, darling?"

"Dear old mum!" said the thin voice, as the mother bent over the bed.

He was a bright-faced little chap, and lay propped up in bed so that he could see the people pass in the street below. The coming and going of the hokey-pokey man with his vermilion-coloured cart was one of the events of his day. Boys passed by down there playing and larking,

sometimes even having an extemporised game of football—that was excitement indeed! What were the thoughts of the little fellow—limited to this one room—confined for the greater part of the day to his bed? “Mum” only knew, for to her he poured out all his longings, poured them out till sometimes her heart felt like breaking.

Mary sat on the edge of the bed. It was poorly furnished; she noticed that a single blanket was all its covering. The bright eyes scrutinised her dress, and the child said abruptly, “Did you know mum long ago, when we had a father? It was quite different when we had a father, wasn’t it, mum? You didn’t work always then, did you, dear?”

“No, Phil, not when we had father.”

There was a silence, and then Phil added, by way of explanation, “He’s dead now, you know.”

Mary could only stroke the hair of the little pillowed head; she had no voice for words.

“Do you have Christmas with your little boy? Would you like to see the scrap-book mum made me? She said it was Santa Claus, now didn’t you, mum? But I saw her making it one night when I woke up. She’s a dear old mum, isn’t she?”

He fumbled under the pillow, and brought out a linen-paged book filled with the bright scraps that children love.

“Mum tells me beautiful stories about them. Do you know about Black Sambo and the tiger butter? It isn’t here, but mum knows it, and she can draw the beautifullest pictures on my slate. Mum, do draw the tiger with the umbrella for the lady. I know she’d be int’ested. You would be int’ested, wouldn’t you?”

“Not now, dear; the lady cannot stay, and mother has work to do.”

"Phil, I should be so interested if—if I might come another day. May I come? Will you let me take him out for a drive? I shall take such care of him. Do—'mum.'"

The ice was broken, and for a little while work was forgotten as the two women talked out of their hearts to each other. It was a common story—a very common one in all large cities. Broken fortune, the death of the husband and father, and the desperate struggle of the mother to save her child. For two years this woman had lain without a blanket to cover her from the winter's cold, only the table-cover; for three years she had laboured from dawn to near midnight, living on such food as the thoughtless throw in the dust-bin, fighting without hope, but ever fighting for the maimed life of her little one.

"When my husband died I thought life was ended for me. We were so much to each other. I never turn in my bed at night but the pain—the loss, I mean—O God! just to touch him and know he was with us! But there, you know—you can understand. You have a husband?"

"Yes, I have a husband."

"What a happy woman you must be! And your babies?"

"I have none."

"Oh!—I am very sorry." And they looked into each other's faces, and the elder took the hand of the younger and stroked it gently.

As she went home with the flush of sunset in the western sky, Mary walked heedless of the passers-by. Mechanically she stopped before a print-shop. In her walks through the city she never passed a print-shop without looking at the pictures. She used to say laughingly that she must be a child at heart, for she dearly loved pictures. So by force of habit she stopped to gaze,

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and her eyes lighted on a mezzotint of the Sistine Madonna—the Mother and the Child.

“After all,” she mused, as she went on her way, “the primal forces win out in the end. The fight to the man; the child to the woman.”

CHAPTER XIV

"JOHN," said Mary abruptly at the breakfast-table, "do you remember speaking to me some time ago about an interest in life?"

"Yes," replied John mechanically. He was skimming the cablegrams in the morning paper.

"Well, I have found one."

"Glad to hear it, my dear. Nothing like an interest in life for keeping the blues at a distance. What is it? Social, religious, or a new kind of game?"

"I'm afraid it's not at all a new kind of game. Do you know anything about outworkers?"

"Outworkers? Outworkers? What sort of outworkers?"

"People who take work from the factories for very little money."

"Oh! what is called 'sweating'? I've heard of it."

"Yesterday I came to know of it."

"Indeed! And what do you think of it?"

"What can one think of it?"

"Don't think of it at all, my dear; accept it as a fact of life. If we stopped to worry over the facts of life, why, to adopt Father Dermot's manner of speech, 'we'd be dead before we lived.'"

"Is all this kind of thing part of your universal law?"

"Please, Mary, don't constitute me a sort of Providence. I am not the ultimate law-giver; that belongs to another tribunal."

"Another tribunal? Is that God?"

"Well, it has an infinite number of names; 'God' is one of them. My dear girl, when I said 'Find an interest in life,' I didn't mean find a problem. To the finding of problems there is no end. There's a whole volume of sermons in *carpe diem*."

"I don't want to argue, John. I don't understand it, that's all. I remember when I was a schoolgirl reading about the Norman Conquest, how William harried the land till the poor people cried out, 'God and His saints are asleep.' I did not understand it then, but I begin now to see what they meant."

John looked up quickly and glanced at his wife. He was not accustomed to confidences of this kind.

"You forget, my dear, that the nineteenth-century seer has declared to the contrary: 'God's in His Heaven; all's right with the world!'"

"And the seer fared sumptuously every day," added she, with a trace of bitterness in her voice.

"My dear Mary," said Temple sententiously, as he laid down the paper and rose from the table; "the safest way, the happiest way for a woman, is the path of convention. Take care. Leave problems alone; stick to conventions. Only the conventional man or woman is taken seriously. Not to be taken seriously is to be—well—damned as this world goes."

"John," and she hesitated as though conscious of some weakness in her words, "what of Christ? He was not conventional. Shouldn't we take Him seriously?"

"Do we? I remember a phrase of Lessing's: 'The Christian religion has been tried for eighteen centuries; the religion of Christ remains to be tried.' Can you conceive it to be possible? Would it even be desirable were it so?"

Temple lit a cigar and looked at his watch. He had still a few minutes to spare.

"The Christian religion, as we know it, is the adaptation of Christ to facts, not the adaptation of facts to Christ. It represents the possible. The non-ecclesiastical Christ is the impossible. Let the wisdom of the Church suffice: she is nineteen centuries old, my dear, and has bought her experience. She has transferred Christ from an impossible arena to a possible one; from the mart, the bourse, the daily—and often dirty—walk of life to a place in the Arts, the stained-glass window, and the organ-loft. She is wise; she knows." He paused, then added: "This has been a novel sort of discussion over eggs and bacon to the incense of coffee. It occurs to me, dear, that you want a change. Aspirations after social reform, religious enthusiasms, and a premonition of early death in the spring, mean that it is time to take a holiday. Ah! my dear, if you had a child tugging at your skirts, there would be fewer woes tugging at your heart-strings. A child centres the life of a woman."

She looked at him appealingly. He caught the glance, and stooping to kiss her, murmured, "I am sorry, dear, I did not mean to hurt you," then turned away to begin the day's work that lay before him.

That afternoon Mary fulfilled her promise to Phil Clifford, and took him for the first of a number of drives. He was pillowed by the hands of Mary and "Mum" in a corner of the comfortable victoria, within view of a host of envious eyes attracted to the windows of the terrace by the unaccustomed sight of such an equipage in the street.

The laddie was too overcome by the novelty of the position to find his tongue at once. They were driving through Randwick to Coogee, and all the way Mary chatted to her little guest, pointing out to him the wayside matters of interest.

The pinched young face with its bright restless eyes

was very grave at first. It was such an immense occasion. But the beautiful lady was so sisterly to him that she speedily broke down the reserve, till soon he was laughing and talking as though it were "Mum," young and glorified, who sat at his side.

The thought of "Mum" troubled him, she found. They had shared so much together that the laddie felt, so Mary discovered, a sense of disloyalty to her in having all this happiness to himself.

"It would be simply 'licious if 'Mum' were here. If I stayed at home some day, perhaps—" but he felt that this was a trespass on hospitality.

"Perhaps what, dear?"

"Well, perhaps if—she is such a dear old 'Mum,' and she is awfully, awfully tired. Have you ever been awfully, awfully tired, just like 'Mum'?"

"Not like that, Phil. Poor mother!"

"Perhaps you would some day—sposing I stayed at home—take 'Mum' out—just once, please. I'm not rude, am I? She said I was to be very 'tickler.'"

"We shall go together some day, for the whole day, and have a picnic."

"Really?"

"Really!" and she felt a hand creep to hers and hold it tightly.

They had reached the bay, and were looking across the sea at the outgoing and incoming boats, when a gentleman in passing bowed profusely.

"Why, it's Doctor Sheldon!" exclaimed Mary; then, heedless of appearance, she called after him, "Doctor! Doctor!"

Sheldon heard, and returned.

"Why, it's good for sore eyes to see you, Mrs. Temple."

"How is it you have never called on us?"

The Doctor was embarrassed. He could not declare that society and he had a merely nodding acquaintance, and that there were also certain sartorial difficulties in the way; so he waived the question by a vague reference to the pressure on his professional services. "God forgive me!" he murmured to himself.

"Coogee on an afternoon in Term," she replied, with a quizzical glance, "does not altogether suggest pressure, does it, Doctor?"

"There's no deceiving you at all, at all. But there are reasons, Miss Mary—I beg your pardon, Mrs. Temple—so you'll be kind, and say no more about it."

"Have you heard from Father Dermot lately?"

"Well, not directly, but indirectly, begad! I have reason to know he's alive. The creatures still find me out. I've changed my chambers three times in the same number of months—partly by way of courtesy to the landlords—it's a way we have in Ireland, you know—consideration for the landlord is one of our national commandments—and partly by way of eluding indirect communications from Dermot, with excess postage."

"When you write to him, Doctor, send him my love. One may send one's love to a priest, I suppose."

"Troth! I don't know about that. Though if you send it, I'm thinking he'll keep it out of harm's way with a blessing for company. I hear that Vaughan and his wife have returned?"

"Yes; there have been many changes since we last met."

"And who's the little man you have in the corner there?"

"This is Phil Clifford. Let me introduce you in form. Doctor Sheldon, Master Phil Clifford."

"Glad to meet you, sir. Is your lordship taking the

air? I understand that the ginger-pop of these parts has peculiarly exhilarating qualities. May I offer your lordship a beaker or a bottle? Then the 'humbugs' of the country are said to have great power—you may take that in two meanings, begad!—perhaps your lordship would deign to partake of them?"

"Humbugs!" exclaimed Mary. "Doctor, I feel younger for this meeting by—how many years shall I say?"

"Say yesterday."

"Let us have some 'humbugs,' eh, Phil?"

"It isn't often that the humble ginger-pop and the plebeian 'humbug' find themselves in such polite society," said the Doctor, as he returned with a small boy from a neighbouring shop carrying glasses and bottles. The Doctor presented the sweetmeats, but firmly declined to share them.

These proceedings, in the meantime, were not regarded by the coachman as at all decorous.

"Now, Doctor, get in and we'll drive you to town, and drop you at your club; where is it?"

"My club! Oh, it's a quiet, proprietary affair, kept by one Mrs. M'Shane. You send your linen out, and please don't waste the candles. The wine cellar is sacred to Bridget and the cockroaches, and the club dines at six-thirty. If you have a friend, that's two shillings in the bill."

"Doctor, why don't you get married?"

"Ah! Mrs. Temple, it's too late for that now. Sure what would I do with a wife at all, at all?"

"Well, get in, and make friends with Phil."

The Doctor got in, and the coachman elevated his eyebrows as he turned the horses' heads cityward.

The Doctor and "his lordship" were speedily on the

best of terms, and the boy enjoyed himself hugely. The new acquaintance was such a funny man, so full of 'licious stories. When they reached home, he took the laddie in his strong arms and carried him up to his room, where "Mum" was waiting for her darling.

Then they drove on, and Mary had a spell of silence.

"Doctor!" said she at last, "you sometimes have a little leisure, haven't you?"

"A little, yes, occasionally a little," he replied.

"Don't you think it might do you good to give an odd hour to 'his lordship' now and again?"

"Since you suggest it, begad I think it would. Domestic felicity by proxy, as it were."

"And there may be little things, Doctor—how can I put it?"

"It's a lean purse, ma'am," said the Doctor, as he straightened his back, "but it goes far. It's an art you've never learned, maybe."

She looked at him with sympathy in her eyes and said no more.

The Doctor was dropped in the city. They did not go to the club.

The same evening Lady Cullingford-Jenkins was "at home." Temple had arranged to call for Mary later in the evening, if his duties at the House would permit. It was one of the many social claims that filled her time, and relieved her husband of demands upon his.

Aunt Sarah still delighted in these nondescript gatherings. Patronage of one kind or another was to her the breath of life. One of her most recent protégés was a sandy-haired young man, whose naturally conservative leanings were mildly tintured with an academic interest in labour questions.

When Mary arrived he had a little circle of admiring

women gathered round him. It was an audience pleasing to him. Assurance is doubly sure when discoursing *ex cathedra* to such an audience.

"After all," he remarked, "there are fundamental facts of life we cannot ignore. You spoke of a new school of political economists, Miss Charleton. Well," and he spread out his hands and wrinkled his youthful brow, "what is political economy? Reduced to its elements, put in a nutshell, is it not the gospel of the stomach?"

There was an uneasy rustling of skirts and a murmur of dubious inquiry. This was certainly a very daring young man.

"Commerce, industry, labour necessarily presuppose an empty stomach. Adam delved and Eve span—stimulated by an empty stomach. The whole complex modern system of exchange is based on the assumption of an empty stomach. Take away the empty stomach, and where is England's greatness? No philosophy of life, no religion, can shut out the rudimentary fact of the empty stomach. What does it all mean—this struggle for life—but to fill by some means or other the aching void, the empty stomach?"

The ladies were deeply impressed. It suggested a world of thought to the matrons in the group with boys whose "aching voids" were unduly stimulated by excessive indulgence in sports.

"So sad, my dear Mrs. Temple!" confided an elderly lady who, priding herself on the classical contour of her features, adjusted her rôle in life to the high standard they demanded. "So distressing! and she the grand-daughter of an archdeacon!"

"Indeed! what has happened to her?"

"Oh! nothing has happened exactly, but it's really too dreadful to think of. It is the refined cruelties of life that cut deepest, don't you think so, Mrs. Temple?"

"Perhaps if you tell me——"

"You know, as I have said, she is the grand-daughter of an archdeacon. One can picture the feelings of——"

"Of the grand-daughter of an archdeacon perhaps, but say the daughter of an archbishop — ah! there we reach a sublimated spiritual atmosphere!"

"I said an archdeacon. Well, she married; I cannot conceive how the poor, misguided child could have done it. Surely she could never have known. But archdeacons are such unworldly men."

"Surely there is no sin in marriage, leaving the deceased wife's sister out of the question, poor outcast?"

"Oh! no, there is no sin of course. St. Paul even recommends it in guarded terms, and under certain circumstances. It isn't the question of marriage or no marriage, but of whom you marry."

"And who then, to use an Ollendorffian phrase, is the husband of the grand-daughter of the unworldly archdeacon?"

"My dear, did you never hear? Why, M'Whirter!"

"M'Whirter, the only M'Whirter, the people's friend? 'All down again, cheaper than ever'?"

"The man, my dear, the very man!"

"They say—at least I have heard—that many a man and woman have had reason to bless M'Whirter. I know of my own knowledge he is a good employer. Well, is he not worthy of the grand-daughter of the unworldly archdeacon?"

"My dear, how can you jest on such a subject? Just think of it—never to take up a newspaper without seeing 'M'Whirter, the people's friend,' staring you in the face. Not to be able to take one's innocent child for a walk without being confronted by an ancestral advertisement on every hoarding! And then all the indelicate details about

corsets and even more intimate things. Can't you realise what torture it must be to the refined nature of an arch-deacon's grand-daughter to live in an atmosphere of cheap lingerie for sale? It would kill me!"

"Does the archdeacon's grand-daughter object to the 'only M'Whirter's' money?"

"Object, my dear? Why, it is the one consolation; and they say she is really generous to her venerable grandfather and her younger sisters, poor girl!"

"And 'the only M'Whirter' pays?"

"It is the least he can do, surely."

"Well, I am sorry, very, very sorry for M'Whirter—no, I mean the grand-daughter of the unworldly archdeacon—it is she, of course, who deserves our pity. Have you ever heard of 'small souls a penny plain, and large ones two-pence coloured'? M'Whirter ought to buy her a two-penny one—don't you think so?"

"Well, I am not good at riddles, dear. But it is really very, very sad!"

"We'll refer it to Mrs. Temple," said a youthful voice. "What ought to be done, Mrs. Temple, to a man who declares that the one guarantee of assured happiness in Heaven that he has discovered is that there is no marrying nor giving in marriage in that beatific realm?"

"Banish him!" she said, looking at the culprit, a fagged-out little man, to whom the question of the increase of population in geometrical, and food supply in arithmetical progression, had living interest, even at this date. "Banish him to—Heaven! Life with a wife may be a punishment, but eternity without one would be unendurable."

The new curate, an amiable bachelor, who leant against the High Church for spiritual support, was the centre of a knot of receptive feminine minds—the younger sisters.

"There is need of greater spirituality in our modern religious life," remarked the curate, "and I'm afraid this is due to the want of a more reverential attitude to small things. Take the flower, for example"—he called it 'flah'—"I never look into the bosom of the rose"—the maidens became demure—"but I marvel at the wonders of creation. My heart sings a 'magnificat.'"

"Does the 'magnificat' include the 'worm i' the bud'?" questioned Mary.

The curate beamed on her through his spectacles. "Even the worm. You cannot measure creation with a foot-rule, Mrs. Temple. In creation all is great, all is beautiful, even the infinitely little—the lowly worm." Then he applied himself to his coffee. He had the consciousness of having said something epigrammatic, without being clear on the point.

"Take again the eastward position—you may say it is merely an observance, relatively a little thing, but——"

As she heard the mild voice with its clerical twang recommence, she fled.

Wandering into the garden, she sought out the fig-tree, the starting-point in her new life; and seated there, looking on the familiar scene, had a sad retrospect of her dream of ambition. What bubble blown by a child had a more transient life? Yet it was beautiful, very beautiful at the time. And what were the real things left when the bubble had burst? Only an inextinguishable craving in her heart, and the cynicism of life eating into her soul. Ah! if she could but return on the road!

When she re-entered the room it was to find that Temple had not yet arrived. It was evident the House detained him. She sought Lady Jenkins to say good-bye. She was tired and dispirited. She would go home, for it was home e in a way. How many women that night would go home

too, and bend over a cot, and kiss a warm, downy face, and ask God's blessing on the tiny life—if there were a God—if. Even 'Mum' was a rich woman compared with her. At last she found her aunt.

"Mary, I've been looking for you everywhere. Read that, my dear. Isn't it delightful?" and she put a telegram in her hand.

"Son born this morning. All well."

She turned aside to hide a face quivering with pain. "Every woman—every woman but me!"

"Well, dear?" Lady Jenkins was mildly astonished at the momentary want of enthusiasm in her niece.

Mary steadied her voice to say, "It is good news indeed. How happy they will be, won't they, Aunt Sarah? Happy, happy Sheila!" and her voice trailed off into a half hysteric laugh. "Aunt, I won't say 'good-bye' yet. Perhaps John may come after all—and home is a bit—just a bit lonely—I mean without him."

So she stayed till past midnight.

Late as it was, Temple came for her at last, not finding her at home when he returned.

"It is late, and you look very tired, dear. I thought you would have been home hours ago."

"Tired? Yes, John. Oh! tired to death. I want a change—you said so yourself this morning. Let me go home. I am homesick, dear."

"Yes, I think it would be wise. I am thinking of taking a trip myself with a party of men—perhaps to New Zealand—at the close of Term. We'll shut up the house for a time and go away."

If he had added "together" even then!

CHAPTER XV

AFTER a long, weary night-journey by train, Mary stepped on the platform of the little wayside station to be greeted by Eric Vaughan. He had come by the coach to accompany her back to the homestead. It was a bleak, grey, winter morning; the sun had only just risen from the mist-covered horizon. The bent old stationmaster, who had been there since the days of her girlhood, was blinking his sleep-filled eyes as he waved a lamp whose yellow light shone sickly in the dawning day. She was glad to think he remembered her as he hurried off to get the luggage from the van. And Eric—what a splendid man he had become, with his bright cheery face, the strong clasp of the hand, and the muscular arms that tossed her belongings on the top of the coach as though they were playthings!

"How many, Mary?"

"Six."

"What! only six packets for a woman of fashion? You ought to have seen Sheila's mountain when we came home. All the treasures of the Ind! Why, no house in our part is now complete without a black elephant from Colombo. Half the kiddies in the country retire nightly with elephants. We brought home six dozen, assorted sizes. Oh! the amount of truck that little woman gathered! and oh! the distribution we've had!"

"Are Sheila and the little one well?"

"Wait till you see them. Ah, Mary, a husband's reign is a short one. The little chap has been crowned king, and at best I'm only Lord Chamberlain. He's a rattling

little chap, though, and as knowing as they make them. Now, climb up on the box; I've kept it for us. And there's the 'possum rug—same old rug."

"The dear old rug. Do you remember how Jim and you with Sheila and me went out 'possuming on the moonlight nights, and how we used to make a fire and sit round it, listening to Jim playing on the jew's harp?"

"Don't I rather? The Philistine world don't know how much music can be got out of a Jew's harp, do they, Mary?"

"Perhaps it's the merry heart that makes half the music. They were dear old days."

"Plenty more of them, Mary, plenty more. God bless us! the world's full of music if you only stop to listen to it."

"You were always ready to stop and listen, Eric. There were a great many 'smoke-ohs' in your day. But what are you going to do now that you are a rich man?"

"All right? Well tucked in? Then away we go!"

The lean, wiry team gave a vigorous pull, and the coach started on its day's journey.

"What am I going to do? Well, that's the great surprise. Came all the way down to be first to tell you. Your father and I are partners. Fixed it up only three days ago."

"Eric! Is it true?"

"Of course it's true. Why, you don't think Sheila and I could live away from the hills?"

"Ah, it isn't that, Eric. You are a good fellow—you——"

"Good! Bless us, what are you thinking of? Pure business arrangement, Mary. We're adding to the old place, and we'll live there, please God, till death or a

drought drives us out. Your father, mother, and the rest of us."

Was it really a dull, misty morning, and was it really a watery sun rising over there? Or was it the brightest, most beautiful day she had ever seen? The dear old dad and mother—the cloud lifted from their lives!

"Eric! oh, Eric!——"

"For God's sake, Mary, don't start to cry—it's so deucedly awkward, you know."

"No, I won't—won't cry, though I want to, awfully. You are——"

"If you say another word I'll chuck the job, get down, and leave you all alone. I will really!"

"Well then, I won't; but I'll think it—and think it all my life."

"Let us think of breakfast, and frizzling things and hot coffee. A winter's morning is full of the poetry of appetite, don't you think so? Three miles of ring-barked timber would turn the thoughts of any poet inward. Don't you feel like that?"

"It's not so bad by moonlight—but in the grey dawn it is a bit grizzly, isn't it?"

"Hold tight, and think of bacon in the air. Whew! this fellow knocks the son of Nimshi into a cocked hat! D-d-d-deuce t-t-t-take the f-f-f-fellow. L-l-look here, old man, g-go slow!"

Rat-tat-tat—slosh! rattled and plunged the coach on its heavy way.

The sun was getting well up, and the mists were clearing off the uplands when they dashed—the horses steaming and spattered with mud to their ears—past the half-dozen houses of the township where they were to breakfast. The coach pulled up at a "pub," and the horses were quickly unharnessed, to be replaced later on by others.

After breakfast Eric had time for a smoke, and Mary filled her lungs with the fragrant bush odour, the scent of gum and moist earth. Oh! but it was good to be in the open again!

Then to the coach once more, and so on, on, till the day grew warm and drowsy, and she swayed against the broad, leathern strap that held her on the seat, dreaming of soft, sweet beds of grass, where she could lay her tired body to rest. She woke with a start to find that she had fallen asleep against Eric's broad shoulder.

The sun had nearly completed its day's course when they reached Fassifern.

The parson and a man from the homestead were waiting for them with horses. The parson had brought down a billy and some tucker, and had the fire going when they came upon them half a mile outside the township. Her horse, Sam, whinnied when he caught sight of her, and rubbed his soft nose against her hand. He had not forgotten her. The parson was greyer and his clothes still wanted brushing, but he was the same parson, just as taciturn, and his eyes had the same abstracted look.

The coach dropped them and went on; the luggage, except the contents of a saddle-bag, would be left in the township till the dray came down next day.

"Sheila would have come if the body had been as strong as the spirit was willing," remarked Eric, "but she says you must take the will as embodied in these scones. Mother will be present in the ham sandwiches and the jam."

"There was never ham like mother's curing."

"You can't make scones like that in Sydney. Look at the size and the whiteness of them, and baked to a turn! Alone she made them, my little woman! Stir your tea

with a twig, Mary, you never get the right flavour unless you stir with a twig. Ah! don't you feel alive now, my lady of fashion? Dear heart! there's nothing like the bush in all the world. We've footled round the East and the West; seen the great Panjandum this, and the great Panjandum that; looked on all sorts of wine when it was red or otherwise; devoured strange meats, and been sick-lid o'er with attractive pastries; but there's nothing in the world as good as this. Eh? what do you say, parson?"

"Well, it's good enough for me," said the parson, as he helped himself to more tea.

Then they mounted and started homeward. Fassifern as they passed through was, as usual, alive with dogs. Many of the residents came to their doors, and recognising Mary, gave her welcome home.

They climbed the hills, and at last saw glinting through the trees, the light of a red-curtained window in what had been Mary's room when she had dwelt in her father's house. It was ready for her, with the sweet, lavender-scented sheets spread on the little iron-framed bed that had held her in the years of her childhood and youth. There mother used to come nightly, and to-night—thank God for the homely link with the past! she would come again to her child's bedside, and bless her as in the dear old days.

Now she could see them standing in the light-filled frame of the door, and as she jumped from Sam's back and ran up the pathway, she saw her mother with arms outspread coming to her. Then she was clasped in them—home again.

Father looked brave; his tall figure seemed to have straightened as though a burden had been cast off, and she never remembered his face less careworn than it was to-night. True, the long beard had become almost silver-

white, and the tanned face was perhaps more wrinkled than ever; but the eyes of the old man had lost their harried look of care.

They went indoors to find Sheila waiting them impatiently. She was not yet quite strong, and had been forbidden to go into the night air. Mary thought she had never seen her look so bonnie, as, clad in a soft, loose gown, she stood in the warm glow of the comfortable room, with its great fireplace filled with blazing logs. But she was bonnier still when the sweet face with the love-light in its eyes was raised to Eric's. And he—how he bundled the soft, warm body to him, kissing the upturned face again and again, loving and unashamed! "It must be good to be loved like that in the old, frank way," thought Mary.

Then the boys greeted her with stoical simplicity. "Hello, Mary!" They had never seen her since the marriage-day, having spent a long, never-to-be-forgotten holiday with her in Sydney.

George was there too. He shook her hand with fraternal warmth, but hesitated at a kiss. With the change of status it seemed almost to border on a liberty, but she drew the lanky figure to her, and kissed him despite himself. He involuntarily coloured, and felt sheepish. George was not used to the society of women. On the flat he viewed them through his books, afar off.

Supper had been spread, and was taken to the accompaniment of unrestrained chatter and laughter. The noise was great, but even in the midst of it Sheila's keenly-attuned ear caught a sound that caused her hurried exit. Eric presently followed her. He longed for a glimpse of the little chap. Soon after, husband and wife returned together, fingers linked in the lover way that had not yet been forgotten.

After supper the parson, who had come home with

them, sang "Tom Bowling." How many times had that unfortunate mariner been sent aloft to the thin tenor of the parson's voice? To Mary it was a call from the far-away days. All that had intervened seemed like a dream.

"We only want Father Dermot and Jim to complete the circle," she said. "How are they?"

"Father Dermot is well," replied Sheila, "just the same as ever. As he was in the beginning he is now, and let us hope, ever will be."

"Amen!" from the parson.

"The old man," added Eric, "has been down with the rheumatism. He'd never have laid up if Bridget hadn't bullied him into it. She hid all his boots. Tied them together, and lowered them down an old shaft with a string. Dermot threatened her with excommunication, but the 'Dragon' said she'd be—well, just that, cheerfully, if he'd agree to keep his bed for a week. He had to give in at last, so he kept his bed for six days with Thomas à Kempis and a volume of Carleton's Tales for company. The seventh day being the Sabbath, he got up and declared that boots or no boots he would serve Mass to the flock. So the 'Dragon' gave in."

"Has the chapel been repaired yet?"

Eric and Sheila became absorbed in private conversation.

"My dear, you wouldn't know it, I believe. Your mother and I are not acquainted with Popish embellishments, but they are said to be very fine of their kind."

"Solomon's Temple in paint and gold-leaf," explained George dryly.

"I am so glad!" said Mary, looking across the room at the absorbed couple.

Dad winked solemnly, with a motion of the head in their direction.

"And Jim?" she queried.

"Oh! Jim is just the same," answered her brother George, "except that he's not as good company as he used to be. He moons about a lot more than ever. They are letting things drift, I'm afraid. Poor old chap! he hasn't turned out quite what one expected."

"Nothing serious?" she asked quickly.

"Oh no, nothing serious—only a sort of drift, 'and be hanged to it'—that sort of thing, you know."

At last bedtime came, and the family Bible was placed before the head of the household. Neither comings nor goings, evil days nor days of prosperity affected the old-fashioned custom. The chapter was read; it was somewhere in Numbers, and most solemnly uninteresting. Certain books were selected for each year, so that in time the whole of the sacred book was read through.

Then the parson offered up a prayer in the staccato manner Mary so well remembered. It seemed to her, kneeling there, that, returning to the old, simple life, she would rest the better for the invocation of God's peace on the household.

But before she went to her room Eric was sent off to have a final pipe with the parson, and Sheila led her on tip-toe to the cot where the wonderful baby lay. All domestic proceedings were conducted in this chamber on tip-toe. Eric entered it after the manner of entering a mosque, with his boots left on the threshold.

One tiny arm with a little clenched fist rested on the coverlet, and on Mary touching it, the hand unclasped, and closed instinctively around her finger. It sent the sweet thrill of maternity through her. How she longed to have the tiny, warm face close to hers! Ah, God, for a child like this! She looked up at Sheila, and saw her face brooding with mother-love over the young life—flesh of her flesh.

She rose abruptly, and said with a forced smile, "I'm afraid to stay longer, Sheila—just for the envy in my heart." Then she kissed her hastily and left.

And as she lay sleepless in the bed where she had slept so many long, unbroken nights in childhood, jealousy racked her heart with pain.

At last, ghost-like, she saw mother enter the room. "Oh, mother dear, I am so glad!—I have been wanting you so much, so much"—and she put her arms round the neck of the kneeling woman and nestled close to her.

"Why should Sheila have a child, and I none?" was the burden of her plaint. "What have I done that God should deny me?"

And "mother's" heart was full. The night was far advanced before she placed the tired head, with its tear-stained face and tangled hair, on the pillow, and crept silently to her own bed—but not to sleep.

CHAPTER XVI

"WHAT'S come over the Doctor?" commented one of the boarders at Sheldon's club. "He's been most confoundedly sober of late."

"Queer old dog! He's up to some game," remarked another. "I've seen him half-a-dozen times of late going out after dinner with a brief bag. Something queer's going on. Mrs. McShane says she found a 'Noah's ark' on his dressing-table the other morning. What the dickens does he want with a 'Noah's ark?'"

"Company perhaps—or maybe to play with. Well, how did he explain it?"

"Oh! blushed like a schoolgirl, she says, and blurted out some nonsense about it being an exhibit in a 'case' he had."

"You just introduce Noah into the conversation to-morrow night, and see how he'll jump."

"Old man's getting rats in the attic, that's my opinion. Ah, here he comes; you see how I'll take a rise out of him. Good-night, Doctor!"

"Good-night, sir!"

"We've just been having a theological discussion."

"Indeed? Something in the way of the higher criticism, I suppose? The younger the man the higher the criticism, eh?"

"Now what do you think about the Flood, honestly?" The Doctor's eyes glinted. "Do you really believe that it was possible to put a pair of every kind of animal into the Ark? Now, as a legal man, do you really think it possible?"

"Well, indeed," said Sheldon blandly, "I've had doubts about it myself now you mention it."

"Ah, I thought so!"

"On the other hand, I've no doubt whatever that Noah had a fair assortment of representative beasts. You see, I've been studying the subject lately."

"So we understood. Perhaps you could give us a list?"

"Well, gentlemen, suppose we start with a brace of young puppies. The race has survived, so that is evidence *prima facie*."

With this shot the Doctor retired to the top of the house, where he had his resting-place.

A new interest had come into his life. Acting on Mary's suggestion, he had one afternoon presented himself at Mrs. Clifford's door and asked after the health of Phil.

The boy had often talked to his mother of that first wonderful drive, and the funny gentleman who had made him laugh so much.

The Doctor explained that Mary had left Sydney for a while, the house being closed and her husband on a trip to New Zealand. Inventing a white lie, he further declared that he was charged with a special mission, and must execute it in person. The hint was too obvious to be disregarded, so he was invited to see the boy.

Phil's eyes grew big with astonishment when he saw him enter the room. Thanks to Mary's efforts among her friends, "Mum" was now in a more prosperous way of life. She could do dainty work, and was paid a fair price for it. Phil, too, had profited by the change. The scrap-book, as his mother noted with a twinge of jealousy in her heart, was not now the great possession of his life. There was a black, woolly dog with beady eyes which jumped most surprisingly when you pressed a rubber ball connected by a tube with his internal organs. It had nothing in

common with any mundane dog. It was an idealised dog, and greatly beloved by its owner. Then there was a jumping-jack, concerning which "Mum" had to simulate shocks and spasms a dozen times a day.

"Mum," too, in her neat print dress had lost something of the old, tired expression. The long hours of night-work had been curtailed, and she was regaining her one-time comely looks.

The Doctor and "his lordship" speedily renewed their friendship, and it was finally cemented by the production from Sheldon's coat pocket of a packet of Everton toffee.

"It is good, wholesome stuff, ma'am," he remarked, "and has, or the like of it used to have, a kindly way of sticking to the jaws that commends itself to youth. I never look at toffee but I feel like meeting an old friend. Ah, the lost joys and the departed digestion of youth! There's a theme for a poet!"

Before leaving, the Doctor remarked: "I've a mind, ma'am, by your leave, and if my presence would not intrude on your privacy, to call now and again to see my young friend here. I've not been privileged in my life to enter very fully into the domestic sanctity of the home, and perhaps it's a liberty I'm taking, but it would be a great pleasure to me—a great pleasure indeed."

Permission was given him, and the Doctor entered his new world. Twice a week, with unfailing regularity, he visited the little home, bearing on each occasion some simple gift that the lean purse could purchase; the "Noah's ark," that had been the cause of so much speculation, found a final resting-place on the set of shelves where Phil's increasing treasures were stored ready to hand.

Many a meditative hour the Doctor spent in the too seldom broken retirement of his chambers, cudgelling his

brains for new stories to tell his *protégé*. Marvellous stories of leprachauns, indigenous to Ireland, with bags of gold on their backs; narratives of King O'Toole and the diverting ways of his goose; and a host of other tales dug up from the depths of the days of his youth, rolled from Sheldon's lips in periods flavoured with the brogue.

The odd, quaint Hibernian expressions coloured the stories with a piquancy all their own. Sheldon, mindful of his brother of the hills, introduced the salutation that grew to be the recognised greeting of his welcome visits.

"God save all here," he would say, peeping in at the door, and the bright face from the corner would ripple with delight, as its owner answered, "God save ye kindly."

Sheldon struck a mine of gold in the adventures of Ulysses; they lasted for weeks and weeks; no serial, "to be continued in our next," ever absorbed a reader more, or furnished a greater store of delightful speculation than did this old classic to "his lordship." To tell the truth, the Doctor made so many incursions into the realm of fancy that the shade of Homer would have wandered distressed for all time, had he heard the wondrously distorted epic.

Phil sighed a deep sigh, as though a joy had passed out of his dwarfed life, when at last, Circe and Calypso eluded, Scylla and Charybdis passed, the hero was delivered into the hands of his faithful Penelope. The Doctor excelled himself in this final description. The domesticated Penelope was painted as a model of all the virtues.

"Just like our 'Mum,'" remarked Phil, nodding his head emphatically.

"Yes, just like 'Mum,'" said Sheldon.

But "Mum's" eyes were bent on her work; she was thinking of a Ulysses who had adventured on other seas, but had, alas, been shipwrecked. Perhaps the Doctor

divined a backward current in her thoughts, for he terminated his visit abruptly; and after he had gone, "Mum" held her boy in her arms for a long time in silence.

"You're thinking of father," said he, nestling close to her bosom. "Some day, Mum, we shall sail away, away, across the sky; it is like the sea, isn't it? and meet him—some day, won't we?"

"If it were not for that hope, Phil, life would be too hard to endure for such as we."

Snuggled to her breast, the boy soon fell asleep, but the woman sat on, dreamily recalling the past. Even the days of childhood were shadowed by a cloud; the early loss of her mother—the house of her aunt, in which the sense of tolerance was a poor substitute for the warm welcome of home; and then—then the crucifixion of her youth. What a travesty of marriage it had been! Handed over like a chattel, dumb, helpless, to a man who inspired in her the repulsion of a clean, pure-minded girl against a satyr. The awful years of her youth, the little still-born life that came into them, to be mercifully hid away for ever! The pain of it came so vividly back that unconsciously she strained the boy against her till he cried out. She put him in his bed, and then returned to the retrospect. One night, in a wild drinking bout, her husband beat her, and she fled. She could remember as though it were this very night—the long, dark avenue of the street, with its distant lamps, its silence, the lights here and there glimmering behind drawn blinds, the echo of a distant footstep that drew nearer and nearer, and then, as she crouched in breathless fear in the shadow of a lane, passed her. It was only some mechanic on night work returning to his home. Would she ever forget the blessed relief of the first break of dawn in the sky, the sense of waking all round her—the sparrows, the fowls, the dogs: was there

ever more welcome music than their morning cries? Then the sunlight came, and the gardens of the suburb she had reached sent out gusts of fragrance from the dew-drenched flowers. The world looked so fresh, so clean, so hopeful, that the sense of her own weariness, the disorder of her dress, untended hair, and unwashed face were incongruous, out of place. How many times had she lived that night in her dreams or solitary thoughts! After came years of fierce fighting for shelter, food, clothing—that trinity of absolute needs. Then—then a face looked into hers out of these years—the face of one who brought with him love, and a home—and this little one at her side, handicapped in the cruel race of life by the worn-out body that gave it birth. What a blessed surcease from pain and sorrow those five years had been, undisturbed by any fear but the one, the ever-present one! She had lied to Clifford. It was years since she had left her husband. He might be dead; indeed she could not but hope he was. Surely heaven, knowing her misery, would blot out the lie. So she married again, but with the fearful secret at her heart that some day he, the menace of her life, might claim her. But each year lulled her fears into greater security. Then Clifford, her true husband, died. The awful struggle recommenced, and now for the child as well as herself. In the isolation of their little home the phantom returned. Many a night she woke up with the misty dream of that old life drifting from her rousing senses, to listen with ears acutely set, and eyes that opened in the darkness wider and wider, lips asunder—thinking she heard his footstep on the stairs that passed her room.

CHAPTER XVII

MARY found intense pleasure in renewing the friendships of her girlhood. Her absence from the station had not been long enough to bring about those changes which so frequently in life rob the wanderer's return of half its joy. There were the same families of "cockies," the homes added to a little, the youngsters increased in number. Some few only were missing, starved off the land; but the greater number had survived, and some had become almost prosperous. It is a hard struggle in the best of times to the little man on the land; but it is a manly struggle, and there is hope in it. Above all, it is a struggle in the clean, open air—and at its worst is better than the lot of the city dependent. The solitude and monotony of the bush life are its least attractive qualities. Men and women grow self-centred when cut off from the companionship of their kind. The trials of the "cocky" are many; but underneath the surface of expletives and elementary-coloured qualifications of description they incite him to, are a brave, independent nature, a faithful, kindly heart. Mary knew the hardships of the life; and gauged the value of the "cocky" and his brood by no city standard. She went in and out among them with the old familiarity, and entered into the simple hospitality of their homes, an equal among friends.

Nor were Father Dermot and his flock forgotten. When she rode up to the priest's house one crisp morning, and dismounting, threw Sam's bridle across the post at the garden gate, she saw the Dragon peering at her

through a window, the next moment to appear at the door with a warm welcome.

"Wisha, God bless us! if it isn't Miss Mary. Sure it's welcome ye are, alannah. Give me a kiss for the sake of old times. It'll do the priest a power of good to see your sweet face again."

"Bedad, that it will!" said Dermot, answering for himself, attracted to the door by the voices. "Take Sam round, Bridget, and give him a drink and a feed. It's he and the old nag will have a great colloque together! Sure, I guessed ye'd come and see the old man before many days had passed. Do ye mind how I said this blessed morning I wouldn't be deceived if she came this very day?"

"Sure and I do," said the Dragon. "It was when ye were cutting the top of the second egg—and asking, by the same token, if I was sure it wasn't a nest one—and that to me, indeed!"

"Ah, father!" and she took the old man's hands in her own, "it is good—real good—to see you. There! I'll kiss you right on the top of the tonsil—or the tonsure—which is it?"

"Neither, my dear, only a patch that's trying to get to heaven before its master. There now, don't strain yourself by getting on tip-toes that way; sure I'll take it in the ordinary, civilised manner. Ah! ye're the same good creature ye always were. They haven't spoilt ye entirely in the city."

They had luncheon out-of-doors on the sunlit verandah, and Bridget laid the little table with the whitest napery, and picked a bowlful of fragrant wall-flowers for its adornment. A cold rabbit-pie, with the mortal remains of the bunny set in good, solid jelly, and the brown crust figured round the edge with a spoon pattern, was the principal dish.

"Indeed, it's the poor and the rabbit we have always with us?" remarked Dermot.

"I've heard wonderful accounts about the chapel, father. You must show it to me after lunch—or dinner—which is it?"

"When we're merely at home, it's dinner; but when we're entertaining, it's lunch. But wait till you see the chapel. Sure Vaughan and Sheila have robbed me of half my influence in the parish. Why, the poor souls don't know themselves now that I've ceased to lash out at them about the state of the altar!"

"Protestants, too!" said Mary, with a grave shake of her head.

"God's heart is big enough for us all," replied Dermot. "I hope ye haven't forgotten it?" with a kindly glance. "Maybe it's easy to forget in the city."

"Yes, it is easy to forget—or perhaps hard to understand."

"They think they know everything—the clever folk in the city, don't they?"

"Perhaps. It's hard to say. Do you know, father, I've sometimes wished I belonged to your church. It's a restful thing to have everything settled and done with, isn't it?"

"There's no rest like it on earth for the weary and the heavy-laden."

"And yet, at other times, I think it is cowardly to give up thinking, trying to think it out. Can one ever think it out?"

"You can't think out the unthinkable, my child. In the end there is only faith. Give it up and have faith. God rules, and for the best."

"It is the awful cruelty of life, the injustice, the pain, the tears of it!—and they call it law! It is so pitiless. It

hears no prayer, spares no life. The little sinless children are crushed by it; men and women, good and ill alike, fall under it."

"Maybe the seeming ill is the real good. It's an old thought, but it is not the new that is always wisdom, you know. There are leaves on the trees in this bush about us, my dear, that you have to crush before you get the scent of them. God rules, and He is good. He knows about it all, and only He. Do you think, shut out here from the streets, I have never felt as you do? I've been there, child, in the midst of it; and I know that after all there is no sunshine of the heart like faith in God."

"Father, I wish you could give me that sunshine."

"Some day you will look around you and above, and realise that Mary Temple is not the universe, and then, maybe, doubt will pass away, and faith dawn for you."

"Ah well, father, you were always my good friend; and you will be still, won't you?"

"Always, Mary, always. Now let us stroll over to the chapel and see the wonderful change that's been made."

They crossed the paddock, and reached the trimly-fenced enclosure in which the restored chapel stood. It had been painted, swept, and garnished.

"It's the proud of it they are!" said the father, waving his hand towards the valley of potato-land. "There's no stopping the boastfulness of them. 'Begorra, man,' says one, 'ye should see our chapel. Sure it 'ud make the Queen of Sheba blush—the beauty of it, the sweetness of it. Tare-an'-hounds, man, there's not the like of it in Australia.' They're like a lot of little children after all; loving and praying and working—and drinking a trifle maybe, but not the ghost of a doubt—bedad, I'd like to see such a ghost! I'd lay it pretty quick with a stroke of my stick."

"Rather a confusion of the spiritual and the physical, father, eh?"

"Sure, you're the same tormentor you always were. Why, you Saxons would rob us of all our Irish privileges."

Father Dermot, when the time came for her to leave, saddled his weather-beaten nag, and saw her a long way on the home-track. His sympathetic nature recognised that there was trouble in the heart of the woman, where peace had reigned in the days of her girlhood. In his kindly way he tried to soothe her with the consolation to be had from the simple, elementary principles that underlay his own spiritual life. Thomas à Kempis was much to the fore, but the good Francis of Assisi ran him a close race. It was moonlight when they parted; and Dermot, looking up through the open way of the track, pointed to the unclouded sky—

"Praised be my Lord for our sister the moon, and for the stars, the which He has set clear and lovely in heaven. We're weeshy things after all, Mary, my dear, when we look into the hollow of God's hand."

Mary, as she cantered on her way home, wisely giving Sam his head, felt a greater peace in her heart than she had felt for many a day. After all, it was a beautiful world, if one only remembered to look at it—and then, with a check at her heart, she recalled "his lordship" looking out on the dusty street, yesterday, to-day, and to-morrow. Was he one of the leaves on the tree of life that God had crushed? Why? It was cruel—cruel! Plaster it over with pretty phrases as the father might, it was cruel underneath. After all, it was better to accept a pitiless, mechanical law, than humble oneself before a pitiless God. "I am becoming a rebel," she said, baffled and dejected. "What does it matter after all? *Carpe diem! Carpe diem!* To-day we have—to-morrow, who knows? John has taught

me that at least. 'I came like water, and like wind I go.' What does it profit one to worry about an unknown, unknowable God? Ah, Sam, there they are, the lights of home; so good-night to black thoughts."

Sheila was so much in demand in these days that Mary had to depend a good deal on her own resources for occupation. As a rule the mornings were filled with little domestic duties. Above all, there was the shrine of the baby to worship at. She would sit on a stool by the side of the bath, with chin poised on her palms, watching with an animal hunger in her eyes the young mother bathing her child; fondling it, kissing the white, soft limbs, and pressing the tender body to her breast.

The desire of maternity grew stronger in her day by day.

In one of her visits to George's hut, on the flat, she had spent a whole afternoon filching a little learning from the miscellaneous contents of his book-shelves. The catholic-minded George had made himself a very comfortable nest, comprising a couple of rooms, bed and sitting-room, and a skillion beyond. Here he lived, *solus cum solo*, except for the occasional visits of the parson, Vaughan, Jim, and a few other tried friends. There was in the nature of the philosopher of the family a strain of the Epicurean. He had long since discarded the bunk for a bed, and the room was canvas-lined and papered. On the walls hung some decent line engravings and a mezzotint or two. But it was in this sitting-room that he had let his æsthetic taste run riot. He had designed it after what he conceived to be the manner of an oaken chamber, and it had all the *vraisemblance* of a scenic artist's effort, and an equal degree of substance. There was a dado of matchboard to resemble panels, and above it a monotone of terra-cotta paper. The whole of one end was fitted with shelves, and these in turn filled with

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books — science, history, fiction. "Stonehenge" and "The Horse" rubbed shoulders in odd company. The floor was partly carpeted, and a lounge and easy-chair invited rest. Mary's nature held something of the literary *chiffonnier* in it. It was a genuine delight to her to ramble through a shelf of books, picking here and there a fragment for the rag-bag of her memory. In the course of a varied meal on George's literary fare she tasted scraps of social science, morsels of dubious wisdom, and certain spiced meats of advanced thought.

Making tea, she hunted up some food and sat down to a couple of hours' enjoyment among the books. In one author she came upon a sentence that caused her to set the volume down and ponder. "Wealth, education, the decay of religious faith," said the wise man, "go with a weak birth-rate." Again, "The development of the race is in inverse ratio to individual development in worth or pleasures."

A volume of Schopenhauer, in which her sex were described as "creatures with long hair and short ideas," was closed with a bang and tossed aside.

"The Island" tickled her fancy, and she copied out a sentence: "The great mark of all progressive nations is that struggle of each man to make some other do his dirty work for him, which is commonly known as aspiration for the higher life." It focussed a lot of city experience for her.

At last the hour for departure came. She picked out a couple of books for closer reading, and, crossing the river on the faithful Sam, went up the hill with a fine haggis of miscellaneous notions in her head, but one kept repeating itself with monotonous persistence, "A child is a woman's right. It is a debt she owes to Nature."

She was defrauded of her right; and she became dimly

conscious of the everlasting struggle of natural forces against social restraint. There were moments in her life when the physical instincts of a body, developed to perfection in the environments of the bush, were fanned into a flame that burnt out reason. The bloodless simulacra of passion that had filled in her life with Temple were inadequate. They were but the make-believes of life, and she desired its realities.

CHAPTER XVIII

ONE morning a rouseabout from Glenfyne, the Hungerfords' station some thirty miles farther up the ranges, riding in on business to Glenmaggie, left a letter on his way for Mrs. Rowe. It was an invitation to Mary and others of the family to spend a week at the station.

"The old lady herself has written," remarked mother; "and it is not often she writes nowadays. Poor soul, I'm afraid she will not be at the old place much longer. Since her husband died things have been going from bad to worse with them. Your father and I used to think a great deal of Jim, and he the only son too; but he has been disappointing, very disappointing. Ruth Hungerford is an old woman now, and perhaps after all it may, I hope it does, last out her time. You young folk change your homes with no more thought than you would give to changing an old dress for a new. Home is just a sort of temporary address to you; but to old folk like myself, your father, and Ruth Hungerford, to leave the old home is a little tragedy."

"Poor Mrs. Hungerford!" exclaimed Mary. "Is she the same as ever? She was always so fresh and bright, and so hopelessly unpractical."

"Yes, exactly the same. Jim adores her just as her husband adored her. Men, my dear, don't always love us in exact proportion to our degree of helpfulness, do they? The helpmate is often incidental, is it not?"

"They love they know not why, mother?"

"Perhaps she would have been different if they hadn't

spoilt her. Sam was always very foolish about her. He starved the station to gratify her extravagance, and Jim, I suppose, is doing the same, though necessarily on a very much lower scale—and yet she is not knowingly selfish. There is no one more open-handed or more generous than Ruth."

"Perhaps, like many another woman, she is weak in financial perspective."

"Well, well! of course you'll go, Mary? You will be glad to see Jim, too. He used to be a great chum of yours in the days gone by. Once I used to think—Ah, well!"

"Think what, mother?"

"Oh, nothing, dear; dreams—only dreams and nonsense. Jim is like his mother in many ways, and I dare say it is all for the best. I can't help loving the boy; but he has been a great disappointment to us all."

"But how? In what way? You all talk in that indefinite style. What has he done?"

"My dear, that's just it—what has he done? It's just what your brother George says; he drifts along from day to day, when he ought to be up and doing, stirring round, moving along with the times. George himself is inclined to moon, but he is energy itself compared to Jim."

"Mother, I shall make it my duty to scold Master Jim when I see him."

"Do, my dear. When you were children together I believe he would have gone through fire and water to please you. He might have been a different man if it had pleased God——"

"What, mother?"

"Nothing, dear, nothing; only an old woman babbling to herself."

It was eventually arranged that George and Vaughan

should accompany Mary. There was an outlying portion of the station which could be easily reached from Glenfyne that had not been visited for some months past; and a question of fences, for a long time lying in abeyance, was to be finally settled now that Vaughan had acquired an interest in the run. Business and pleasure could thus be combined.

Mary was in the best of spirits in anticipation of the excursion. Vaughan's pleasure, on the other hand, was somewhat discounted by the fact that Sheila could not make one of the party. George viewed the trip with something of apprehension. It was the rainy season, and he had had a lifetime of experience in the hills. Already there had been a heavy fall of rain, and the river was running strong. Again, in the higher altitude to which they were going, a fall of snow was a contingency not too remote to be taken into account. However, the river as yet was safe to cross, and a snowstorm was in the nature of a possibility rather than a probability. The crisp air at Glenfyne, situated as it was near the snow-line, would be the best of tonics to Mary; and after all, if weather conditions became unpropitious, it would only mean prolonging her stay till she could return in safety. With a picked day and an early start they could make fairly sure of accomplishing the journey of thirty odd miles by sundown.

As it happened, the Tuesday fixed was an almost perfect day.

At daybreak Mary and Vaughan set out from the homestead. The grass and foliage were damp with dew, and the morning air, as they went down to the river-bank, struck raw and chill. The light of early day was not exhilarating to the spirits, so they were glad, after splashing across the ford, to canter along the flat to the bit of rising ground crowned by George's hut. They found the many-

sided George busy in the skillion preparing breakfast. The philosopher was an excellent Bush cook, and had attained such perfection in his art as to grill the chops instead of frying them; also, you could go far before tasting better damper than his. Up at the station they made leavened bread after the manner of town folk, but George remained true to his damper. In certain matters, such as the brewing of coffee, he excelled. It was made in a Parisian coffee-pot, and served with an abundance of hot milk. George's coffee was decidedly good.

The wet leaves and grass were sparkling with light as they set out. The sun was up; and the scrub along the river-bank was beaded with silver. As the sun's heat increased, the leaves and earth gave out a warm, balsamic odour. At the river crossings the banks sloped rapidly away, the rich soil covered with a tender growth of ferns.

Leaving the river, they plunged into the denser scrub, tangled on either side with vines, the air close and damp. Not a fallen branch nor withered tree but was clothed with a garment of moss or lichen. Old rough-barked trees with nodules and excrescences on their trunks, twisted limbs, and torn, ragged bark, raised their heads above the dense undergrowth that margined the track, on whose deep bed of leaf-soil the horses trod noiselessly. The branches overhead caught and interlocked so that the travellers rode beneath a canopy of leaves. The sunlight, filtered through the foliage, was tempered to a cool, green tint.

Before leaving the river they crossed the open patch of country where, the last time she had travelled this way, Mary had played a part in the parson's battle for his dog.

"What has become of Yanakee Jack?" she asked.

"Oh, after the Homeric encounter between him and the parson, he left this side of the country for some years.

There were certain rumours of cattle-duffing that associated themselves with his name, and the place became rather too warm for Master Jack. So he wisely went elsewhere for a season, but, worse luck, has returned, I believe. At least, so a cockie told me the other day."

"Yes, I saw the brute myself a week ago," interposed George, "looking, if possible, more hang-dog than ever. He had actually the cheek to speak to me. Hoped I would let bygones be bygones, and was generally so crawlingly civil that I've been on the look-out ever since."

"Isn't it very risky to leave your hut as you do, without a soul in it when you are away?" asked Mary.

"Well, perhaps it is, but we're so far from the highway of civilisation that we've allowed a primitive trust in our neighbour to become part of our lives. Bolts and bars have no practical use in these parts. You ought to know that, Mary."

"Yes, it was so; but now it seems strange after the city."

At mid-day they topped the first high peak on the day's journey, and rested for luncheon. The horses had been going steadily upward since the river had been left; and Sam, who had become a bit soft owing to luxurious days in the home paddock since his mistress's return, showed signs of the want of condition. The enervating air of the thickly-wooded country they had passed through was now exchanged for a drier atmosphere. The water from the little mountain stream at their camping-place was as cold as ice. The spiral of blue smoke, aromatic with the twigs and leaves of gum that crackled in the fire over which the billy hung, rose straight into the air. Below stretched a glorious panorama of billowy green—a forest ocean. Facing the travellers, the ranges rose and fell, mounting with each ascent to more sparsely timbered country. Far away

against the sky-line, they caught a streak of white, the snow-capped head of the highest peak.

If in the morning the conversation had flagged a little, the afternoon brought full compensation; the attenuated atmosphere they breathed acted as a tonic. Even the horses seemed to appreciate the change, and made a pace that, before the crimson flush had died from the evening sky, brought them within a few miles of the station. Jim had ridden out to meet them. He came from the west, the tall figure swaying with the easy grace of a rider who has become almost a part of the horse he bestrides.

The homestead was of the typical bungalow order, without pretension, but comfortable and roomy. Under the bright sky of midsummer you could see its iron roof and verandah lying like a pool of sparkling water in the hollow of the hills, where the house had been placed to shelter it from the keen westerly winds of winter that, crossing the snow-capped uplands, cut like a knife into the thin-blooded folk who dwelt on the lower levels.

Mrs. Hungerford met them at the slip-rail of the paddock beyond the house-garden. She was a delicately made little woman to be the mother of that son of Anak, Jim. But if Jim had his frame and physical fibre from the paternal side, the *laissez-faire* side of his moral nature was surely inherited from this dreamy-faced creature, who looked up at him so tenderly and helplessly. There was nothing of the hardy pioneer about Ruth Hungerford. She was in absolute contrast to the "Mother" at Woollawillie. The round, fair face, in its frame of white hair, retained the childish simplicity that must, in past years, have won her husband's affection in an appeal for protection. Remote from crowded habitation, she had spent a listlessly luxuriant life. Ease and self had been cultivated at the cost of virility and truth. Tears came readily

to her placid blue eyes, but one doubted if she had ever felt one real ache of the heart.

She had been her husband's pet lamb, now she was her son's; and they had adorned her with ribbons and golden bells, and gewgaws of one kind and another, till the pet lamb had devoured their substance as effectually as the seven lean kine of biblical record ate up their seven more plumply-favoured brethren. It is wonderful what a pet lamb of mediocre vices, and equally mediocre virtues, can get through. Her husband had laid down his life for her, crucified on the tree of financial worry; and now her son Jim, without his father's stronger will and moral fibre, drifted down the stream. It would last out her time, and after her—well, the deluge! What was the good? Was there anything under the sun worth worrying about? There were seven days in the week, mostly sunny ones. God is good, let us sit in the sun. That was about the sum and substance of Glenfyne philosophy.

Yet there was a certain attraction about Ruth Hungerford. In her husband and son it had developed into devotion; in her friends it became a sort of affectionate tolerance.

There was no lack of hospitality. It was marked by a careless profusion of necessary things, and an abundance of unnecessary ones. If you inverted the old saw, about a place for everything and everything in its place, it would be a fairly accurate description of the household mismanagement that made the visitor glad that, after all, it was only a temporary abiding-place.

The polish of absolute cleanliness, that gave the solid, old-fashioned household goods at Woollawillie a shining morning face, was absent at Glenfyne. Dining-room, bedroom, and the whole place, had a suggestion of the day after the feast.

Mary and her companions had no reason to complain of the heartiness of their welcome. The Bush welcome is not, as a rule, effusive; it preserves the Anglo-Saxon tradition in that respect, but, equally in the spirit of the race, it is heartily sincere.

In the equivalent to a drawing-room that opened off the verandah—it was a house without a passage, room opening into room—was an ancient piano of metallic tone; it might have been a spinet, thought Mary, as she mentally compared it with the modern instrument. Here in the evening they gathered and sang. Mrs. Hungerford piped plaintively about “The Banks of Allan Water”; and Jim gave nightly in a deep baritone “Nil Desperandum,” his sole and inapt song.

Mary was touched by the tender care the big, loose-limbed son showed his mother. The little courtly acts, that in the atmosphere of colonial life are apt to be forgotten, from lack of thought rather than lack of heart, were in this remote corner preserved with jealous care. It was the inheritance of his father. If the mother left the room, it was the son’s hand that opened the door. It was the same hand that brought the cushion or the footstool. It was on Jim’s arm that she rested, when pacing the weed-grown garden paths.

The intellectual side of life at Glenfyne was represented for the most part by fiction and the current magazines. Each mail (it was delivered at erratic intervals) brought a new packet for Mrs. Hungerford. Light literature was scattered all over the place. The books and papers, with their illustrations, gave a momentary fillip to the vacuous hours of her life; then they drifted, as everything else seemed to drift in this house, into holes and corners. The cats mauled them, the dogs worried them; you would find one in this corner, another in that; on the verandah, in the garden, under beds, everywhere.

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"Maman," as she loved to be called, was the daughter of an English medical man, who had, whilst completing a course of study in Paris, fallen in love, after the *grande passion* fashion of the folk in whose midst he was dwelling, with a pretty-faced Parisian M'am'selle, who brought Ruth into the world as she, little more than a girl herself, made her exit from it. It was, probably, from the maternal side she drew the easy-going temperament, the love of ease that formed the dominant note in her character. It was from this source also that she probably inherited the love of romance that clung to her even in the decline of years. The greater part of her life had been lived in an atmosphere of patchouli-scented love-making. Living physically in the midst of this mountain purity of air and scene, her imagination held its being in a vitiated, close-pent habitation. How much of her nature in this respect she had transmitted to her son was doubtful, for the saving grace of an active, outdoor life had, if traces of it were there, held them in check.

During her visit, Mary became conscious of a conflict of repulsion from, and yet of attraction to, her hostess, the latter partly by associations of childhood. The healthful discipline of the home at Woollawillie, with its daily round of household tasks, the ever-present sense of duty, loyalty, and conscience, removed, she felt how easy it would be to fall into the idle lotos life of her new surroundings, and let the senses weave their dreams about her.

Happily, long rides in the fresh, clean air, prevented the spell from being cast on her. "Maman," she would declare to herself, as she and Sam faced the keen, snow-tempered air from the uplands, "Maman is decidedly unhealthy."

For the first few days Vaughan, George, Jim, and

she were frequent companions; then the two former went their way to settle the question of boundary fences, to return later on, and pick her up on the homeward journey. Consequently, in their absence, she had to depend largely on Jim's society.

Sydney and her life there seemed in these days far remote. Temple, travelling in New Zealand, sent her occasional letters as opportunity was afforded him. They were excellent as descriptions of travel; but a certain formality of expression robbed the messages of affection, of the emotional spontaneity that touches a woman's heart. They were the letters of a husband, but a husband is not necessarily a lover. Each letter brought a sense of increasing loneliness to her, and the child factor loomed daily larger in the woman's heart. How she would have treasured the crudely-written scrawl of a child—her own child—and have kissed the blotted crosses that sent their messages of love!

During the excursions they made together, she and Jim restored in some degree the familiar relations that had existed between them before her marriage. With what she regarded as akin to a sisterly interest, she tried to arouse in him some spark of ambition, some incentive to success.

And Jim, the old life renewed, felt the quickening of a larger hope in his outlook. She broke down the silence of the intervening years, and courting his confidence, unwittingly roused to its old impetuosity the passionate love that time had been lulling to rest. It sparkled in his eyes, thrilled him through when he touched her hand, and almost forced its way through teeth which he clenched in a desperate sense of honour.

CHAPTER XIX

THE end of the visit to Glenfyne was spent almost wholly indoors. Up to that time the winter had been exceptionally dry, but now with the month of August came heavy, drifting rains. A fire burned all day long in the living-room, and yet it was difficult to keep the cold away. If a door were opened, the keen air rushed in and made the inmates shiver. At night the wind whistled and moaned round the old wooden house as though the nymphs of Valhalla were abroad. The rain fell continuously on its iron roof.

To Mary, the monotony of the cooped-up life, the dreariness of the rainfall that went on steadily from day to day, became almost intolerable. "Maman," curled up in rugs and bolstered about with soft cushions, was, cat-like, placidly content. Then she had her little romances, written with Gallic frankness. Dozing, dreaming idleness was all-sufficient for her needs.

Mary paced the house like a prisoner not yet inured to captivity. She read novel after novel, till her mind sickened of their never-ending pursuit of the feminine. It was like a diet of bonbons to one who had a healthy appetite for more substantial fare. Time after time she would throw one of "Maman's" precious volumes aside and look out through the window at the grey, misty landscape. The valley below was blurred by clouds; here and there one could trace the out-cropping head of a rugged peak lifted above its fellows. She could hear the roar of a distant waterfall. In midsummer, it was a stream that fell like a streak of molten silver down the ebony face of

rock; now it was a river that leapt with wild Valkyric shriek into the valley below.

Then she would sigh and return to her novel. There was nothing else to do. She had tried the piano, practised all the songs she could find, old, yellow-tinted, dog-eared pieces, many of whose title-pages bore illustrations of maidens with voluminous skirts, and wreaths of roses on heads of plastered hair or mathematically adjusted rows of curls. But it was all vanity and vexation of spirit. She wrote to every friend on her list voluminous letters, but even this came to an end, and it, too, was vanity. Then she returned to the novels.

The great relief of the day was the home-coming of Jim. He came with the freshness of the outer air about him, his face rosy from the beating of the rain, bright and keen. There was the scent of horse and tree and soil about him—better a thousand times than the stuffy, boudoir atmosphere that seemed to cling to every one of "Maman's" treasures. It was good to feel the cool, firm hand close round hers, to hear the deep-toned voice in the house. Good, too, after Jim's evening smoke, was the chat by the fireside whilst "Maman" slept.

In those long evenings, with the winter rain and wind sweeping round the house, and the big gum logs on the hearth sending the drifting sparks up the cavernous chimney, they drew dangerously near to each other in sympathetic confidences. Stored away in Jim's mind was a wealth of picturesque thought. From his childhood he had been a dreamer of dreams, and had fed his imagination from the storehouse of the poets. Aided by an exceptional memory, he would repeat in a voice that caught the music of the flowing words, long extracts from Tennyson, Longfellow, Swinburne, and Rossetti. His taste for the muse was catholic. And Mary, looking into the glowing heart of the fire, with the music of Jim's voice in her ears, and

the ever-changing pictures of the poems in her eyes, felt the bitter sweet of a love that might have been hers, had not that other intervened.

At the close of the second week Vaughan and her brother returned. The weather had cleared a little; the rain was no longer continuous, but the clouds were ominous of more. The men were anxious to return home. Now that the rain had come, there was so much to do there. But Mary stood in the way of an immediate home-going. The river must be running a banker by this time, and clearly it would not be possible to get her safely across, even if they themselves could compass the venture. So, chafing at the delay, they broke into the third week. Towards its close there was a distinct and hopeful change in the weather. For the first time since the rain had set in, the clouds broke, and the sunlight came down to the moist earth, and set it steaming in a dense white mist. Down in the valley whence they had come they saw a great rainbow spanning from side to side. The following day they caught a glimpse of the wooded country leading up to the range. The rain was clearing away, and though the river would still be high, in a few days more it might be possible to ford it. The delay was becoming unbearable to the two men, and yet they dare not undertake the risk of the journey with Mary. It was an easy day's ride home in good weather, but no man could say how long it would take after so heavy a rainfall. Vaughan had a double reason for impatience. It was now nearly three weeks since he had seen Sheila and the little one, and this consideration of the heart had more weight with him than the other consideration of the pocket.

Jim at last spoke to him about the matter. If Mary would consent, and Vaughan and her brother approved, he would take her home the following week, when, if the

weather still held up, the river would be down, and all risk at an end.

Vaughan hesitated. She was in his charge, and the responsibility for her safety rested with him. He clearly could not take her for some days at least. And yet he must get back—there was so much to see to—and Sheila and the little one. It got on his nerves to be house-bound day after day. Jim was—well, he was like a brother; had they not been children together? After all, what harm could there possibly be in it? An easy day's journey, a trusted friend. One could not observe all the conventions in the Bush. There wasn't any real harm in it. He would hear what she had to say.

Mary, being consulted, at first protested against any delay. She was ready to take the risk. Had she not been born in the Bush? The river went down as quickly as it rose. There wasn't any real danger in it—and so on.

But George shook his head gloomily, and even suggested that Vaughan should go on alone, and that he would remain for Mary, but of this she would not hear. They must go together or not at all. Vaughan was not Bush-born; this was his first big flood; he must not go alone. And so at last she consented—giving up the battle against the desire of her heart—to remain and return under the care of Jim.

So the two men set out alone, and she waved farewell to them from the verandah, but with conflict in her heart.

The weather continued to hold up, and a week later Jim gave reluctant judgment in favour of the journey homeward. Mary also showed an increasing desire to return to the homestead; largely due to the growing fear of her own power of self-control. These weeks of daily companionship with the man who had shared so much of her early life, and whose nature was in some ways in close sympathy with her

own—closer, as she knew, than that of the man by whose side duty and honour decreed that she should henceforth walk—had been full of danger to her peace of mind. It must end, and end speedily. Therefore she urged the home-going.

The parting from "Maman" did not require any heroic effort. Mary was still held to her by the memories of the past; but in the wider experience of later days, she judged less favourably the value of the soul that had its habitation in "Maman's" earthly clay.

The morning of the departure showed unfortunately a probable return to rainfall. It was grey and cheerless. Heavy clouds banked up, and a drizzling, intermittent rain set in, with the sound of thunder in the distance.

Jim, at first, flatly refused to start. There was no use risking a misadventure. If there had been any shelter on the way down, even a boundary rider's hut, perhaps they could chance it. But there was none; and once started, they must either return or press on. But Mary was obdurate. She had set her heart on returning without further delay. She was in peril. This one long day with Jim, and no more. She could not bear more. Her husband was becoming dimmer and dimmer, a figure lost in perspective; and the old lover, the jilted lover, was winning his way. God help her safely back, quickly—soon—to-day. Yes, she must go. Storm and flood, she would face it all, for at the end lay safety, loyalty, and the chill security of her husband's home. Passion and the Puritan wrestled within her. The impress of her parentage and early training was not easily effaced. She would go.

Jim saw the imperious nature of his boyhood's sweetheart flash into new life. It had been absent from these later days, and he had almost forgotten its existence. But now recalling it, he knew it was useless to protest. As if to

finally determine the matter, the clouds broke and let a gleam of sunlight through. So the horses were saddled, and a pack-horse was laden with her luggage. "Maman" was roused from a delightful dream by the impress of lips on her cheek.

"Bon voyage, little one," she said, "come again soon ;" and drew the eiderdown quilt to her chin.

Jim insisted on a good breakfast, and that disposed of, came round from the stables with Sam. Then they started, the pack-horse, who knew every inch of the track he had travelled for many a year, leading the way.

The raw mist of early morning closed in on them, and they followed the track blindly for a couple of hours, till the haze lifted sufficiently to show them the straggling trees lining the rough bridle-path, and dripping with moisture. Fortunately, it was a fairly well-defined track, though here and there Jim dismounted, as they descended into the more thickly-wooded country, to note the blazes on the trees, and so make assurance doubly sure. He trusted largely also to the instinct or experience, whichever it was, of the pack-horse, and his own mount. Descending abruptly, they entered the mist-filled cup of the valley through which they had to pass. The sense of isolation from the rest of the world was complete.

"We might be alone in the world," remarked Jim.

"Or passing through the valley of the Shadow."

"One goes alone into that valley—but this is different."

"It is very uncanny, Jim. Not to be able to see ahead of one—to have to take so much on trust. It feels as though every step may bring one to the edge of a precipice."

"But for the rattle of the mare's hoofs ahead of us."

"True. She represents Hope, poor old thing! After all, it's not so unlike the big world outside, is it?"

"What! Hope ahead in the mist?"

"With a pack on his back—that means so much to a woman—eh, Jim?"

"The pack? Not always, Mary. A pack isn't everything to every woman."

"Ah, well, it is most things to most women. It all depends on what it is."

"Fine feathers for fine birds," said Jim, with a touch of bitterness. "Well, that's a light burden, anyhow—if that's all Hope carries."

"Perhaps it means more to a woman than that. There may be more precious things in the pack than fine feathers, Jim."

"What more can it carry for a woman? Even the angels, you know, are credited with fine feathers."

"Don't try to be cynical, Jim! That's motley for fools, and you are no fool."

"No fool? Ah, Mary, I'm the veriest fool in a forest, and I hold to my folly for dear life."

"Forget it, Jim; forget and be wise."

"When that other valley has to be faced, perhaps then. No, I'll carry it through with me even there."

"Jim!" pleadingly. "You said—you know——"

"Ah, Mary, you talk of Hope and its pack, of all the gifts and riches that lie in that pack for a woman. Is there no place for the best of them?"

"The best?—ah, what is the best? Who knows? To-day we think this—to-morrow, that."

"Well, you have found ambition, power, wealth, leisure in the pack; are they not good, Mary?"

"To a man, yes. To a woman, they are insufficient. There are only two things in the whole pack of any real worth to a woman."

"Well, what are they?"

"Ah, that is the secret—an open secret that some day every woman knows."

"May I guess?"

"No, no, I am only jesting. You must not look at me like that. You said, Jim, you never——"

She felt her breath come quickly through her lips. If she were only safely home! Why did she not make them take her—take her from herself—take her from this lover who was closing on her till she could not escape—could not. What folly to play with fire! Had he really guessed her secret? The child! The child! The words rang in her ears. She knew then that the whole world meant to her but two things—love and a child. What was the use of warring against the nature of things? Love and a child, yes, love and a child. They were the beginning, the end, everything—to a woman.

They were silent. She looked furtively at him, half fearfully, half—had she realised it—half in desire. But silence and time saved her. The dim light in which they rode darkened; a vivid fork of lightning pierced it momentarily, and upon the heel of the crashing thunder came the pouring rain. Shelter there was none. They were about midway on their journey. There was nothing for it but to go on, and after all, the storm meant safety to them both.

The rain continued without a break. A sodden sandwich and a drink of water, with a few drops from Jim's spirit-flask, was all the refreshment she had. Thickly clothed as she was, the never-ceasing rain wet her to the skin. Travelling as they had to travel, in the midst of the storm, it would be well into night before they could reach the homestead. Suddenly she was roused from the apathy of wretchedness that was numbing her senses, as the cold had long since numbed her limbs, by an exclamation from Jim.

"What is it?" she questioned.

"The river! We'll never cross it, Mary, never! An hour of this and it will be running a banker."

"We must. I tell you, we must. I'll get home to-night, or I'll—I'll kill myself. I will, I tell you, I will go home!"

She blazed into a passion, and struck Sam again and again with her whip.

"I'll get you through if man can, Mary."

"I tell you, I will get home—with you or without you, Jim. I'll get home or die!"

In half-an-hour's time they reached the first crossing. The river was running rapidly, but was still fordable. At the bank the pack-horse funkcd. Jim drove her into the water, and then they went in themselves, just clear of her heels. They were drifted down-stream a few yards, but made the sandy spit, or what remained of it uncovered, on the other side, and in safety.

Later they had to face the second crossing. A huge snag blocked the way a little distance below the ford. This time the pack-horse had to be cut again and again with the riding-whip Jim took from Mary. It was of no avail; the brute, with her lumbering pack, would not face it. The toy whip was useless. Then, grasping Sam's bridle, he put his own horse at the torrent. They plunged in; the horses swimming steadily, they got midway into the current when they heard a half-human shriek from the unfortunate mare. She had followed them; and, weighted by the sodden, inert mass of the pack on her back, had drifted on the snag, against which the water rushed with tremendous force.

"For God's sake, Mary, keep his nose up-stream!"

She looked with wide, fearful eyes on the flood, rushing over the submerged tree. Yard by yard they were drifting to it. Jim had flung himself into the water, and swam with

one arm, whilst holding the stirrup-iron with the hand of the other. They were near the bank now ; and with a supreme effort the horses grounded, pulled themselves up the bank, and stood shaking in every limb.

"We're all right now," said Jim, his pale, dripping face peering up at Mary. "Another half-hour, and we shall reach George's crib. We've survived Hope," he added, with a grim smile.

The river was already spreading over the low-lying ground, but they plunged and splashed through it safely, till in the failing light they saw at last the outlines of the hut.

When they reached it, Jim dismounted from the weary animal that had carried him so faithfully. It had made a great fight, but was played out, Jim declared, with an emphasis that brooked no contradiction.

"We can go no further to-night. Look at it."

She looked and saw a waste of water between her and the further side that must be crossed before the city of refuge—her father's home—could be reached.

"No further," she said wearily, as Jim helped her off. Then she put her arms round Sam's neck, and broke into over-wrought, hysterical weeping.

It was, however, only momentary. Jim took the horses to a bark stable near the stock-yard, some distance away. In the meantime, Mary went indoors and lit the oil-lamp on the table of the living-room. Some old clothes in George's bedroom she put out for Jim's use, and then appropriated the apartment to herself. Taking off her wet outer garments, she spread them on the back of some chairs near the fireplace. Jim would dry them.

She did it all in a dull, resigned, mechanical way. Her mind was blank ; she could not think. What would it profit if she could ? It could end only one way.

Jim, returning, lit a roaring log fire in the ample hearth. Then he changed his clothes, and dried those Mary had put out. Soon he had a kettle on the fire; and rummaging through George's stores, found sufficient food to make a substantial meal. He laid out the table, and then waited. The steadily falling rain, the wild surge of the river, and the occasional crash of the dead timber that came whirling down it, filled his ears. But he waited for an under-sound. In his dry clothing, sitting in the red glow of the warm fire, all the misery and peril of the long day faded from his memory. He saw, in the half dream of this luxurious ease, a face, a form—the one in all the world to him. She must be sleeping.

He rose, and went to the bedroom door.

Then—and his heart stood still for a moment—he put his hand upon the door. With the tense alertness of the senses in that moment he caught the sound of stifled sobbing. It struck him like a blow in the face, and with it came the hot flush of shame. Had he come to this?

He went to the outer door, against which the storm beat in furious gusts, and threw it open. The flame roared up the chimney, as the cold, wet air rushed in. He stood there, bare-headed, with the rain beating on his shame-filled face, lashing the hot blood into subjection. He would go out into it. It was a rare tonic, this fierce, strong wind; he would come to his senses out there in the grim, stormy night.

He rapped at the bedroom door.

"You will find some tea by the fire, Mary. I am going down to the river." He waited a little while, and then repeated it.

"The river, this awful night, Jim!" she answered in amazement. "You will not leave me here alone? Surely you will not."

"I will come back—presently."

She wondered at the short answer, not knowing the struggle in the man.

He took down an oilskin coat from the peg behind the door, and the act set him thinking of George. Of all nights for him to be away! Was it Kismet? Well, he would fight it out in the storm.

He had not gone far when he felt the water round his feet. The river was still rising. Then he thought of the warm hut filled with ruddy light—and the woman there. A few more hours of this rain, and the river would be beating at its door, the light quenched, and then, God help them! But he would hold her in his arms at last. He could hear the logs crashing in the swirling water of the furious river. It would be icy cold, but she would be close to him. The last drift of a useless, wasted life—the last drift, Jim!

Facing about, he saw the light glowing in the window of the hut; and it drew him back with a power he could not resist. The fever had left him now; he had a steady hand on the rein. Yes, he would go back. He felt quite sure of himself now—quite sure. When he re-entered the hut Mary, in her dry clothing, was seated on a rug in front of the fire. Her dark hair streamed down her back. It was the past renewed. How many times in the old days had they sat together on the hearthrug of the cosy fireplace at the old homestead, he weaving wondrous dreams of the future for her receptive ears! The face she turned to him was tinged by the warm light of the logs. It sparkled in her eyes.

"It takes me back to the old, the good days, Mary."

"I thought it would," she answered. "Sit down, Jim, and let us dream that we are children again."

He lay at her feet, and let the warm firelight play on his

tanned face. Her hand rested for a moment on his damp hair. They looked into the red, cavernous wood fire, and remembered the castle-building of the years gone by.

"The castles, Mary," said he, giving words to the thought. "The chateaux in Spain, the wonderful chateaux——"

"Ah! the poor things! Gone up the chimney with the smoke. Fire, smoke, nothingness; only the ashes and the cold hearth at last."

"Mary," said he, as, propping his head on his hands, he turned his face to hers, and looked intently at it, "are you happy? I sometimes doubt it. You say odd things!"

"Oh, happiness is such a relative term, Jim! How can I say?—how can any one say?"

"Have you gained all the world—all your world?"

"There was a world I hoped to gain, Jim. Isn't life like a parable? Do you remember how we used to make up parables? They were a sort of permissible form of fiction in our day. Do you remember?"

"Yes."

"How the wind roars! Will the rain never cease?"

"The river is rising."

"But it has been rising all day."

"Yes, but I mean——"

"Danger, Jim?"

"Perhaps. It is beyond the last flood mark." He crept closer to her. "But the parable——"

"Yes," she replied, looking on the outstretched figure that had been drawn so close to her—"Yes, the parable. 'A woman went into a far country seeking happiness, and on the way she met a wise man who asked, "What seek you?" And she answered, "I have come hither to find happiness." "It is," he said, "a long search and a near search;"—that was the way we used to make them up, you remember. "There are many paths to it that lead a weary distance,"

the old man said, "and yet it is near at hand. Some go by this path, which will take you to the City of Pleasures. It is a well-trodden path; many go, many return. Yonder is the way—it is sadly grass-grown—that leads to the City of Self-Denial. Some have trod it since the Christ passed that way, but they are few."

"“And the great highway with the pushing crowd, where does it lead?” asked the woman.—Have I caught the old style, Jim?”

He nodded assent.

"“That is the road to the City of Wealth.’ ‘How they crush,’ she said. ‘See, they are trampling on each other—ah, look! Can you not stop them?’

"“No,’ said the wise man. ‘It is a road that widens every day, but the crowd is ever too great for the road. Beyond it, where you see the young men racing, is the road to the City of Fame. Many die on the way; many return, old and defeated.’

"“And this little path?”

"“That is a simple way. Many women chose it once and were content; many still return to it, after wandering by other ways.’

"“What is it?”

"“That leads to the place called Home, where dwell Love and the Child.’”

"And the woman?” queried Hungerford.

"Ah! she turned her back on it, Jim. It was too poor, too simple. She chose the highway to the City of Fame, poor fool!”

"But she returned?”

She shook her head.

"Mary, you—you want to return?” He rose to his feet, trembling.

"There is no returning.”

"But you want—you do want to return?"

"Yes, Jim, I want what every woman wants before all else—love and—and a child."

She had been gazing into the depths of the fire, but as he bent over her their eyes met, and in that moment all the barriers of life, its duties and its codes of law, went down.

He caught her into his arms.

The dawn was breaking through the clouds when Jim answered the repeated knock at the outer door.

In a moment the inner door was closed behind him, and the lock shot in its place.

"Who's there?"

"ME!"

"Who?"

"Yankee."

"What the devil do you want? What brings you here?"

"Well, Mr. George——"

"I'm Hungerford. What do you want?"

"Open the door."

Jim opened it, and let a streaming figure into the room.

"Well, what is it?"

Yankee stumbled to a chair at the fireside.

"What is it? Hell! that's what it is. Hell. Don't you know a man when he's half dead? Crossed the river, lost the—horse, struck on a snag. Gimme something to drink."

"You can't stay here."

"What do you mean? Turn me out?"

"You can put up at the stable; there's plenty of straw knocking about."

"Stable be damned! I've been there, and now I'm

going to stay here by the fire. Mr. Hungerford, you wouldn't turn a dog out a night like this."

"I say you can't stay here."

Yanakee staggered to his feet, his eyes blazing with sullen fury. As he did so, he kicked on to the hearth a woman's boot. Jim saw it, and inwardly cursed the mischance.

For a moment Yanakee stared speechless at it, then, burst into an evil chuckle.

"My God! And that's Sam in the stable."

"Out you get!" and Jim, with murder in his voice, pointed to the door.

Yanakee walked to the door. He held it open for a moment.

"Good morning, Mr. Hungerford. Maybe the——"

A quick movement from Jim checked the words on his lips.

And Yanakee, as he lay in the straw of the stable that night, saw his way to an easy and assured means of livelihood.

CHAPTER XX

"WHEN did you receive my telegram?" asked Temple, on the evening of his wife's return.

"The afternoon I reached home."

"That was——?"

"Thursday."

"And you left Glenfyne on——?"

"Wednesday."

"Wednesday? I'm afraid I have not quite caught the sequence of your adventure. Just run through it again."

"We left Glenfyne on Wednesday morning, and reached George's hut late that evening."

"And George?"

"He was away."

"Rather embarrassing, wasn't it, with Hungerford?"

"Oh! Jim and I, you know, were children together; and we were not altogether alone."

"Who else was there?"

"That dreadful man—you may remember me telling you of the fight about the dog."

"Oh yes! Jack something or other. Is he still there?"

"He had been away, but has returned."

"So he found shelter in the hut too?"

"Yes, he was there."

"Ah, well, that saved you an awkward situation. And you got home next day?"

"Yes; the rain ceased soon after daybreak, and late in the afternoon we managed to cross a little higher up the river when the flood was going down. I got your telegram

when I reached home—it had been waiting me a couple of days ; so I took the coach on, Friday. John, how well you look !”

“Yes, dear ; I never felt better in my life. We had a glorious time ; but it was very rough, and pretty hard travelling.”

“I’ve wondered if you’ve missed me. Did you—a little ?”

“A little ? No, not a little, but a great deal, *chérie*. It was the best thing we could have done. We both wanted a thorough change, and perhaps—what does the old saw say about absence ?” He drew her to him, and kissed the passive face with something of a lover’s ardour. “Are you cold, sweetheart ?”

“No, John. It was only a little shiver at the thought of the river and the flood, and—and the cold.”

“Yes ; it must have been a trial to your nerves. Still you look none the worse for it. Do you know, Mary, I think I will take life a little easier in the future. One grows a bit selfish, too close at work. I’m afraid you must have often been lonely.”

“Only sometimes, John—perhaps—well, it might have been different—you know what I mean ?”

“We might have been a little closer to each other. Is that it ?”

“Perhaps !” and she stole a furtive look at him. She could not face him frankly yet. The lesson of deception was not so easily learned.

“Wife !”

“Yes, John.”

“Let us start fresh. Lift up your head, dear.” She raised it, but she could not look into the eyes she knew were fixed on hers. “Let us start fresh, dear. I have been neglectful, cold ; will you forget it all, and let me

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atone?" There was a note in his voice, a depth of earnestness in his appeal that went to her heart like the keen edge of a knife. Only a week ago—only a few days ago—and such an appeal would have had a quick and resolute response. No taint of dishonour could have sullied her then. But now, now! Ah! now it was too late.

"What do you say, Mary—wife? Will you take me into your heart again? Once I asked you to share my life; now I ask you to give me your love. I want it—want it badly. Away, I've been able to get our life more into perspective, and I've seen the real poverty of it. I want to make it richer for us both—richer in the best of ways. I've been a lonely man, dear—I was making you a lonely woman. Can't we do better with our lives? I want to try, Mary; give me your hands, your promise, your lips—and help me."

He held his hands out to her. If she could have given hers with impulsive eagerness—the eagerness that had waited uncalled for during years of married life, till it had found an outlet in revolt. If—if only she could have given them clean of dishonour, but now——

He sighed and turned away. She saw the old absorbed look return; knew that from this silent self-contained man no further offer would come. Stirred from the accustomed groove, he had caught a glimpse of something better, and had grasped at the opportunity of their renewal of life together, hoping to realise the better part.

"John!"

He turned quickly; her hands were outstretched to him. He caught them and raised the one whose finger bore her wedding ring to his lips, and kissed the symbol of their union.

The pain of it, the overwhelming sense of her treachery, made her faint and dizzy. He held her in his arms, and

rested her head upon his shoulder, and pressed his lips to her colourless cheek.

“My wife, let us love each other, and live anew.” But she was sobbing—sobbing wildly, with the abandon of the night when, as a child, she had crouched at her mother’s door.

CHAPTER XXI

THE river was down again ; the rains were over ; and Jim sat moodily on the verandah at Glenfyne, smoking his evening pipe, or rather one of many pipes. How cursedly dull it was ! What a dog's life one led in this place ! It could never be the same to him again—never ! It was awful to be tied up, day after day, moving in the same monotonous round. He got up and paced the verandah. Restlessness and fever were in his veins. Over and over again he lived the past. He could think of nothing but her eyes, her lips, her voice. And then the meanness of it all ! He tried to thrust the thought of this away, to find excuses, arguments, that would still its recurrence. Cynic philosophy thrives better in the city than in the solitude of the hills. And even there the average man shrinks from a breach of the social contract which is knit into the sacredness of home life. A return to first principles, to the elements of life, was very well for an academic discussion ; but life is not lived on first principles. God ! how could he face the old "mother" ? He knew he had not dared to, the afternoon they went up the hill together with guilt in their hearts. And yet, if he had to live that night again, he would not have it otherwise. Would not ? He recalled their childhood ; and fingered at his watch-chain the half of the lucky sixpence they had divided between them, boy and girl, in the purity of their childhood's affection. The picture of the girl sweetheart, fresh, sweet, untainted—and now, this later picture, blurred with passion. How it dragged it through the dust ! And the baseness of it ! He, who had always

faced his man—to sneak, to rob, to skulk away! After all, was it worth it? Then he would swear to himself that it was worth it, and he would dream again of the joy of holding her in his arms. But always to return to the sense of a lost worship and a personal degradation.

“’Night, Mr. Hungerford.”

He had been so absorbed in the mental struggle that he had not heard the slip-shod feet approach. The night had come, and in the darkness he could not see the face of the visitor.

“Who is it?”

“Me, Jack.”

“You? What do you want here?”

“Want to have a talk with you, Mr. Hungerford. Perhaps you have a job knocking about?”

“Do you think it likely? A job for you?”

“Stranger things have come to pass, you know, Mr. Hungerford.”

“I’ll give you three minutes to get clear of the place. If you don’t, I’ll set the dogs on you.”

“Not this time I think, Mr. Hungerford; and maybe it’s just as well to keep a civil tongue in your head.”

“What do you mean, you dog?”

“Well, I want to do business with you in a civil, business-like sort of way, and you talk of the dogs. That ain’t the way to do business friendly-like, Mr. Hungerford.”

“Well, what’s your business? You’re a likely sort of man for me to do business with.”

“Well, I ain’t much of a lady’s man!” with an obvious sneer.

“You infernal blackguard!”

“Do you mean to do this business, or shall I go—to the lady, eh?”

Jim gave a gasp of rage, and rushed at him; but Yanabee was on the alert, and dodged out of harm’s way.

"If you try that game, Jim Hungerford, I swear I'll stick a knife in you!"

And Jim saw the dull gleam of a sheath-knife in his hand.

"You gave me three minutes just now; I'll go better and give you five. If you ain't ready to talk business by that time, well, I know who will be."

Jim raging, was yet conscious of weakness. A week ago, and knife or no knife, he would have been at the man's throat. Now, he—he—yes, that was it, he dared not. To think of it—dared not! He, Jim Hungerford, dared not kick this cur off the place!

"Well, Mr. Hungerford, the five minutes is nearly up."

"Well, what is your business?"

"Ain't it rather near the house? Unless, of course, you don't feel——"

"What! Don't feel game to go with you?"

"That's about it."

"Come down to the store. There's no one there to-night."

They went down, and Jim lit a candle in the hut where the miscellaneous stores were kept, and sat down on a box.

"Now, say what you've got to say."

Yanakee, with an assumption of elaborate politeness, half-cringing, half-ironical and blustering, said his say.

Jim looked him straight in the face.

"You dog, you—" he stammered, with the sullen rage of one who is trapped and helpless. "And if I say no—if I say no?" and he rose with a blaze of passion in his face. "If I say no?"

Yanakee edged back, and felt for the haft of his knife.

"Well, if you say 'No,' perhaps Mrs. Temple may say something else. See here, I'm playing a fair game; I might have gone straight to her, but I give you the first call."

"The first call!" The phrase rang with a knell in his ear. They would have to pay, he and she. Whatever it cost, he must save her; that much of honour at least remained. Yes; they would have to pay.

He sat down in dogged silence, his eyes glowering with the light of sullen, baffled hatred. Then they talked business.

It was a big sum; so large that Jim ground his teeth, and rose impetuously to his feet when he heard the demand.

"Do you think I'm made of money? Where is it to come from?"

"Oh! you'll find it, Mr. Hungerford. Never mind where it comes from, you'll find it."

"Every acre of the run is mortgaged up to the hilt; you must know that—it is common property; why, every 'cockie' in the place knows it!" he added bitterly.

"You'll find it all right."

"And if I do, what then? How am I to know that you will not come the day after for more? When you have sucked me dry, what then?"

"Time enough when that happens."

"I'll pay you half, and pay your passage to the States."

"I'm not going to the States; and if you can't find the cash—well, I'll go elsewhere, to some one as can. It don't matter to me," he added, with an air of indifference; "I've struck a patch, and if you don't buy, why I haven't far to go for a customer."

The candle had been sputtering for some time, and now went out suddenly. They sat in the darkness till Yanakee struck a match to light his pipe. The flame for a moment lit up the evil face, with its grin of self-satisfied triumph.

"I'll give you half, and ship you away."

"No; not a damned cent less."

"Then, by God! I'll kill you, if I have to swing for it!"

Yanakee had blown the match out, but the red top still glowed between his fingers as Jim sprang at him. So sudden was the attack that he had not time to reach his knife. They rolled on the floor with the inarticulate sounds of struggle. Without his knife Yanakee was the weaker of the two; but for all that, he was a muscular man, and they fought on the earth-beaten floor of the hut with the tenacity of dogs, and as to one with their weapons. Yanakee got his teeth into Jim's wrist, and it was only by an effort that brought every ounce of strength into play that he succeeded in getting the man under. Then, planting a knee on his chest, he gripped his windpipe with the free hand, and straining every nerve to strangle him, succeeded in releasing his other hand. Yanakee made a supreme effort to wrench himself free, but unavailingly.

Jim lost all thought but to crush the life out of the man beneath him. He could feel the blood flowing down his fingers from the wounded wrist, as he held, now with both hands, a relentless grip on the throat of his enemy.

The place grew deadly still, and the darkness hid everything. Only the deep breathing of one man and the stertorous moaning of another could be heard.

Yanakee's life was on the ebb-tide, going out in all the blackness of night, when through the crisp air came, with the distinctness of a ship's bell across the water, a woman's voice—"Jim, Jim!"

It was his mother calling him.

Involuntarily the muscles of his hands relaxed, and the voice still ringing in his ears struck on his senses with the repetition of blow upon blow. Why, this—this was murder! Murder! What had he done in his rage? Then he bent

over the man, and whispered hoarsely in his ear, "I'll give you half; not a shilling more. Half or hell—which?"

And Yanakee, all but unconscious, with bulging eyes that saw fantastic lights lacing the pitchy darkness, found breath enough to give his assent.

"Half," said Jim; "and," he added, with a knee still pressed on the chest of his prostrate enemy, "I swear by every sacred thing that if you raise a finger or utter a word to injure her, I will kill you as surely as I have spared your life to-night. I swear it, do you hear me? I swear it by my Maker. Now, get up and go; you will have the money when I can get it."

Yanakee sat up, and then staggered to his feet. By degrees the night air revived him. He got his horse and rode down the valley track.

Jim washed his hands, put a rude bandage on the wounded wrist, and returned to the house. A dim light was shining in his mother's room. As he crossed the space that lay between, he felt glad that his eyes could not see the old familiar place. After all, dull, dreary, monotonous as it was, it had been his father's life, and this his father's home. And the end that had been approached so stealthily in the past years was coming very near now.

As he stooped to kiss his mother "Good-night," he noticed how grey her hair was, and how old she looked. God would be merciful if he took her before the end came. On the impulse of the moment, he put his arm around her neck in the old boyish fashion, and kissed her withered cheek again and again.

She looked up, and smiled wonderingly at him—her tall, brave son.

CHAPTER XXII

"PROSPERITY begins on the ground floor, and poverty ends in the attic," remarked the Doctor, as he welcomed Mrs. Temple to his chambers at the head of the staircase.

"Well, after all, Doctor, that is only another way of saying that poverty may bring one nearer heaven," she replied, with a smile, and a hearty shake of the big red hand held out to her.

"At all events we get the best air up here. Sure it's an age since I saw you last, and it's younger than ever you look. I saw your husband yesterday, and the change in the man! May the dev—ahem! but I never saw a man so changed for the better. His trip did him a power of good."

"Yes, John was never better or stronger in his life."

"Ah, it's good to be young and rich, married and happy!"

"Riches don't always spell happiness, Doctor."

"Not in the copy-book, ma'am, I admit, but a varied, if not too lucrative, criminal practice has destroyed my faith in the copy-book as a life chart. Believe me, my dear lady, a starved soil doesn't yield the best flowers."

"I don't think Father Dermot would agree with you there."

"Dermot! All Dermot knows of life is harmless. Begad! a babe in arms could twist him round her little finger. You couldn't pour money into that man's pocket quicker than he'd pour it out. If ever a man was born again, it's Dermot; and he's never grown since, for it's the child's heart he has and always will have—God bless him!"

"I think He has blessed him, Doctor. Simple desires, simple life, simple faith ; what better ?"

"Maybe it's all right in the country, ma'am ; but the city and the simple life don't mix. When the friend of the simple life in the city goes up higher, it means, well—the attic. If you remember, Mrs. Temple, it was when Simple Simon came in touch with the pieman that he first realised the importance of the penny. It's a great factor entirely, that same penny."

"Well, leaving the pieman and his pennies, Doctor, tell me how you have been getting on with the new interest ?"

"Getting on ? Why, it's galloping we are ! The best of friends indeed—why, David and Jonathan could not have been thicker. Oh ! the diversions we have ! Poor little soul !" and the Doctor's round face softened with sympathy ; "drifting along, ma'am, to the great Ocean. A brave, plucky little soul, too ! Always as bright as a new six-pence. Devil a murmur ! Says he to me one day, 'Doctor, says he, 'if a gentleman, a real gentleman, was, as it might be, going to die, now how do you think he'd do it ?' 'Well,' says I, 'that depends, ye know,' cudgelling my brains for an answer for the boy. 'That depends entirely.' 'But,' says he, 'if he'd got to, 'cos it couldn't be helped, how do ye think he'd do it ?' 'Well,' says I, 'do ye mean a rich man or a poor one, or a young man or an old one ?' still cudgelling my brains. 'Why, wouldn't it be all the same if he'd just got to—to die, you know ? 'Spose he wouldn't cry, would he ? No ? Not even if he was 'fraid, dreadfully 'fraid ?' says the little chap, looking very hard at me. 'Well,' says I, taking the laddie's wee hand, 'a real gentleman, a very real gentleman, would take it, I think, with his mouth shut.' 'Oh !' says he, looking mighty solemn, 'that's very hard, Doctor Dick, isn't it ?'—specially

if mother was there.' 'That's what the real sort of gentleman would think—Mother is here, and I must keep my mouth closed very tight.' 'Oh! but he might just hold her hand—if he was a very little sort of gentleman, not grown up at all, you know.' 'Yes, laddie; a real sort of gentleman couldn't do anything better than just hold mother's hand—the tighter the better—God help her!' Begad! I had to blow my nose for half a minute before I could make a dash into the new story I had ready."

"So he knows it must be?"

"Yes, he knows; still, there's always a shadow of hope. A fool of a doctor I sent there one day, a youngster at the business, let enough out for the boy to make a shrewd guess at the rest. Do you know, he's cute beyond his years. I've a plan in my head, buzzing about there for many a day."

"What is it, Doctor?" asked Mary, in a subdued voice. Sheldon's story had gone closely home to her child-loving heart.

"Well, it's this. That little chappie, and his mother too for the matter of that, have lived their lives in the city. Couldn't we manage to give them a breath of decently pure air? Think of what it would be, ma'am, to the boy, to see the bush before he goes out of the world—if he's got to—and perhaps in one way it's the kindest thing that he should go out of it; but I'd like him to have a glimpse at the world's bit of paradise before he leaves it all."

"Would it not make the—the going out harder?"

"Not with Dermot at his side."

"Oh! you think of sending him to your brother?"

"Well, I think it might be managed; just the mother and the boy, if Bridget can find room for them."

"Doctor, you're an angel!"

"Then I'm sorry for the angels, ma'am. Maybe, heaven,

like poverty, makes one acquainted with strange bedfellows. But don't you think it might be managed?"

"Indeed, I do."

"Well, we can't manage it yet. The boy could go; but his mother—we just fall short of the mother by two pounds five and twopence."

"She shall go; I will see to her, and the boy too."

"Excuse me! the boy is mine."

"Oh, Doctor, nonsense!"

"The boy is mine, ma'am, if you please."

"Well then, Doctor Dick, dear old friend, the boy is yours—to the uttermost farthing."

So it was arranged; and the Doctor set out a week later with a light heart to break the good news to the little household he had taken under his care.

Phil was waiting him with more than ordinary expectation. They had reached a critical point in the adventures of one "Fin-ma-cool," an Irish giant of exceptional parts, who had challenged a Scotch giant, of alleged equal prowess, to mortal combat. The recital of the great meeting was to be told that night, and the lad was all agog for the dramatic entertainment. During these proceedings, which were accompanied by much illustrative gesture on the part of the Doctor, descriptive of the combat—when stones the size of mountains were thrown about, and the panting of the giants equalled the "big wind"—"Mum" sat quietly sewing, employed at work that could be done by hand, so that the whir of the machine, which filled the room the greater part of the day, would not interrupt the story.

At last "Fin-ma-cool" so effectually beat the Scottish champion that the latter, who was a mighty "lepper," had to return to his native land by way of the North, crushing a few score of the frugal and ascetic inhabitants of that region under foot, as he made a running jump across the sea.

"And that's the end of the story?"

"Yes, laddie; and the last story for many a day."

Then he told the two how he had written to Father Dermot, and arranged for their visit. Its possibility had been hinted at before; but in those days the Doctor dealt so much in matters of marvel and romance of great pith and moment that no precise or accurate substratum of truth was looked for in any forecast of his. Now, however, that the matter had been carried to a practical issue, and the journey to the hills had been brought within the domain of fact, the mother was confronted with a multitude of obstacles—but beyond them all shone the sunlight on her boy. It needed little persuasion to overcome her fears; and one by one the obstacles disappeared before the optimism of the Doctor.

A few days later he stood at the window of a railway carriage, from which the pale-faced lad looked out on the bustle of the station. A hurried "good-bye," a thin hand waving farewell, a glimpse of "Mum's" face, in which gratitude and anxiety mingled, and they were away, spinning out of the city, with its crowded factories and houses and their smoking chimneys, to the dry air of the uplands.

Father Dermot had called in Vaughan and Sheila to his assistance, and they gave him their hearty co-operation. The dray had taken a load of necessary furniture from the homestead—bed, blankets, and the rest—to the priest's house, and Vaughan met the visitors at the station. Coach travelling was too rough for the boy, so Eric brought a buggy from Fassifern, and drove them to the foot of the hills by easy stages. The bullock-dray, with a good thick mattress on it, and plenty of rugs and pillows, carried them safely upward, and then along the spur that led to Stonyford.

Bridget had at first opposed vehemently any intrusion upon her domain.

"An ould man like him to be bothered with visitors, indeed! Visitors at his time of life, upsetting the poor soul's comfort, gaddin' about all over the place! What wid the woman pryin' here and sniffin' there, and teachin' me my business, maybe, and the boy turnin' up his nose at good stirabout, and wantin' jellies, and soups, and mustard plasters, and goodness knows what! Musha, but the world's comin' to a pretty pass when a priest can't have his house to himself!"

But Dermot knew a way to draw the "Dragon's" teeth, and by casual references to the pleasure he anticipated from the visit, and the pride he would feel in showing these city people how a home should be kept—kept as Bridget alone could keep it—and how he had long desired that folk could see what a devoted creature she was to her old priest—so wrought upon her feelings that at last she caught some of his own enthusiasm, and in the end became as eager to welcome the guests as Dermot himself.

It was, therefore, a very hearty greeting they received when the dray deposited them at the door. Dermot was in the foreground, and Bridget not far removed. She was adorned, as to her head, by a species of night-cap with elaborately goffered frills, and as to the bosom of her bombazine dress by an immense oval brooch, that held a design in plaited hair, gathered from the pates of deceased ancestors. It was her sole piece of family plate, for one could not call it a trinket, in any modern sense.

They were dead tired, and the boy's weary face appealed at once to Bridget's sympathy. The one spare room of the house had been converted into a bedroom for the mother and child. Its white scoured boards, with the strip of carpet, the snowy linen on the bed, and the

suggestion of scrupulous cleanliness, made the best kind of luxury.

Not even the novelty of their surroundings disturbed the rest of mother and child that night. And the awakening—with the sweet-scented air flowing in and filling the little room through the opened window, the cow-bells tinkling in the distance, the notes of the bush-birds, and the homely clutter of the fowl-yard—it carried “Mum” back in a dream to childhood, and the boy, propped up in his bed, looking out through the window at the grass and trees, still moist with the dew of night, gave a deep breath of tranquil happiness. It must be very near to heaven, this beautiful bush!

Then they heard the cheery voice of Father Dermot, and next Bridget came to tell them that breakfast would soon be ready.

As the mother lifted the wasted body of her child from his bed, she pressed it close to her, so much the dearer for its very frailty. Sickness and disease seemed out of harmony with the exhilarating sense of physical health that appealed to her in this country air, and the contrast filled her heart to overflowing with pitying, jealous love for him.

It was a delightful breakfast: the eggs, the milk, the butter, and the bacon—were there ever viands more delicious? And the kindly face of the old priest beaming on them gave the meal a double benediction.

The morning was spent on the sunny verandah of the cottage, Phil breathing in the air of paradise. It was all so wonderful, so past expression, that his tongue was silenced. Now and again he gave a deep sigh of blissful content. The father, in subtle sympathy, was satisfied to let the boy take his fill of the draught of a new life.

As Mrs. Clifford was of the faith of his Church

there was a common interest between them, and at the same time a clearly-understood line of demarcation. He was the Priest.

In the afternoon, a boy, by name Patsy, brought round a shaggy little pony, saddled with an ingeniously contrived basket-seat that Vaughan had adapted and Sheila padded, for Phil's conveyance.

And then commenced the first of those delightful excursions, the memory of which, in after days, returned to him as dreams of wonderland.

Patsy led the pony, and "Mum" and the good father walked at his side.

CHAPTER XXIII

A WEEK after the arrival of the visitors, when Phil had become accustomed to his novel way of conveyance, they paid a visit to the homestead. It was not a great distance to traverse, but the pony's pace could not be quickened, consequently they did not arrive till the afternoon. They had luncheon by the way, the boy resting on a bed of bracken, surrounded by a green sea of the broad-spread fronds poised on their wiry stalks.

Many a traveller, to whom the round world and all that dwell therein had become commonplace, would have envied the lad his keen zest for the wonders of this little corner of the earth. Each day brought a new store of pleasures to him. He never tired of watching the lizards on the water-worn stones in the bed of the creek, their mobile, metallic tinted bodies, now motionless save for the quick flick of the tiny tongue, now darting with a momentary flash of steel into the dark cover of the cracks and crannies. Or, far down the creek, arched in with outstretched boughs, through which the sunlight filtered, making golden discs on the dark green pools, he would watch for the glint of blue from the solitary kingfisher. It was, indeed, a world of beauty to this city-born child.

At the homestead they received a hearty welcome. "Mother's" heart went out to the laddie and his mother. They two, only they two, with the world to fight, made a strong appeal to her. She contrasted in her mind the brisk, cheerful, almost riotous life of the days when her girl and boys were growing up around her, the health-

flushed faces that gathered round the family table, with the solitary, monotonous life of these two pallid citizens of the dusty street.

They returned laden with dainties from her weekly baking, and home-made jam and little delicacies that did not come within the simple domestic menu of Mistress Bridget.

Sheila vied with the old "Mother" in the hospitality of her welcome, and the baby was much in evidence. The older woman, of the city, felt herself closely drawn to this lovable little mother, whose maternal pride sparkled in her eyes as she pointed out how strong and big and lusty was this son of hers—forgetting for a moment the other son, till, seeing the withered body, she remembered—and her heart smote her for the boastful pride of her lips. She put her child in the arms of the boy's mother, and bent over Phil with kindly words.

In the evening, she, with Vaughan, accompanied them part of the way homeward. Her husband and the priest were familiar gossips, and did not lack for conversation; so, leaving them to stroll ahead, she devoted herself to the boy and his mother, winning her way to their hearts by simple, unaffected conversation, and the innate sympathy of her gentle nature.

Vaughan and the father, having exhausted some local topics of interest, fell to philosophising on life. They generally did, these two, having in their natures something akin.

"Do you know, father, in my heart I have a great pity for you."

"Indeed, Vaughan? Then thank you for nothing."

"Now, you are a born father—I mean the word in its everyday sense. Yet your Church condemns you to celibacy. Do you never rebel? Do you never think of

a home in the only true sense one can give to the word? Don't you sometimes want children?"

"Ah man, do ye think I've never felt the cravin'? Begor, the sight of the little Patsey's down on potato-flat, with their red-headed polls, and sitting like so many flame-coloured crows on a fence, cheers me up like a winter fire. Devil doubt it: but it's the proper thing to increase and multiply, as the saying is, but the Church knows its own business, I suppose, and perhaps it's all for the best. If we married and had children, maybe we'd neglect the Church, and forget our duties. There's a lot to be said for a celibate priesthood, and perhaps, after all, the man who renounces wife and child finds the rest of the way a bit easier."

"You mean that, having conquered the strongest of human desires, the remaining acts of renunciation are minor matters?"

"There's oratory for ye," said Dermot with a twinkle of the eye. "Yes, something of the kind—and yet I doubt if the day ever comes to some of us when that desire is wholly extinguished."

"It lies at the root of all, the perpetuation of one's kind, does it not?"

"True for ye. I never rise in the morning and look down on the flat, with the mist of night rolling off it like a fleece under the shears, the young red tips of the gums peeping up wet and glistening, and then at the wee bits of things at my feet, the ferns and grass springing from the mould, but I think of the great travail of the earth, the eternal process of birth. Why, in the spring-time in this country, the bush blushes, as you might say, into universal nativity."

" 'Such primal, naked forms of flowers,
Such letting Nature have her way.' "

Eh, father?"

"True for ye, Vaughan. It will be a sorry day for civilisation when she counts herself more than the race. The race before everything, my boy. Strong sons and buxom girls are more to the world than all the advance in science and the arts. I'll back Molly Malone against the musical glasses any day. It does my eyes good to see a decent woman with a clutch of downy-headed rap-scallions round her skirts. Begad, I often think," said Dermot, with the glint of whimsical humour in his eyes, "that if I wasn't a father, I'd be a mother. 'Deed an' I do."

"And a good mother you'd be, sir."

"Well, I'd be prolific, anyhow, Vaughan; an' that's getting fast to be an old-fashioned virtue."

By this time they had reached the point of separation, and with a hearty farewell to Dermot and his guests, Vaughan and Sheila set their faces on the return journey.

As the weeks sped on, each day bringing some new interest to the boy, the fresh air and genial sunlight gave the feeble body draughts of invigorating life.

The warm-hearted farmers and their wives in the sea-girt valleys of potato-land had a ready welcome for them; and frequent visits were paid to the well-kept houses with their surrounding gardens of gay flowers. Many an hour the lad spent down there, listening to the stories of the home-land, for which these Irish emigrants retained—and would retain till they lay under the sod of the little graveyard near the chapel on the highland—the devotion of their hearts. Such hedges, such ditches; wild strawberries linked on a thread of straw, crab-apples that set the teeth on edge, fields white with mushrooms! He could shut his eyes and see the farm kitchen, with its smoke-blackened beams strung with ropes of onions and flitches of bacon. He could see the folk gathered at the turf

fire, and as the wintry wind whistled round the thatched eaves, listening with bated breath to stories of the "ban-shee." Doctor Dick in his wildest imaginings could not make the flesh creep like some of these old "grannies" with their tales of the supernatural. Then the droll stories of the men, and the pleasant "aisy" way of them, and the open-hearted hospitality that met mother and child at every turn! Some of the laziest vagabonds—for there were some drones even in this hive—were the most lovable; so, at least, Phil thought. And he loved them without any differentiation on grounds of moral worth. There was one young rascal, named Shaun, who apparently spent his days in the giving of gratuitous advice unaccompanied by work, who was a mine of romance to the boy. Shaun, on the slightest provocation, would light his pipe, and lie down in any available shade, if it were only that of the post-and-rail fence, and spin out of his fertile imagination stories of the most marvellous texture, to which the boy, with eager ears, would seriously incline.

But, as in that first Paradise the time came when the dwellers went forth to face a sterner world, so with these two. The close of the visit was already beginning to mar the days with little, obtrusive thoughts of the return to the city, when one afternoon, as the lad and his mother sat on the verandah of the priest's house, a man rode by. He was roughly clad, and carried across the pommel of his saddle the blood-stained skin of a slaughtered kangaroo. As he rode carelessly past, swaying to the motion of the weary horse, he turned his head round, showing a sullen and cruel face. As he did so, he jerked the horse suddenly, and with an oath pulled him up. The woman on the verandah, when she saw the face turned on her, blanched white as the apron on her dress. She stood for a moment motionless, as though held in a

paralysis of fear ; then with a wild cry turned, and, catching the boy in her arms, fled indoors to her room. There, placing him on the bed, she sprang to the door and locked it, standing by it rigid, as if cut in stone, straining her ears for a sound.

It came, but not at the door. There was a rustle of the creeper at the window, and she turned her head with staring eyes to the open space. She could see with the minuteness of the tense sense of sight in that horror-stricken moment the stretch of the cleared grass-covered paddock, the brown spots of the distant cattle, and near at hand, round the casement of the window, the sprays of leaves with a great heavy-headed rose nodding on its stem ; then a shadow fell across the space, and into it came the evil face of the man from whom she had fled. She saw the muscles of the face contract, the lips part, exposing the smoke-stained, irregular teeth. She shrieked with terror as the head rose, and the man's hands were pressed against the sill. He was coming in to claim, to seize her ; coming back from the dead ! With a desperate cry she caught the terrified boy from the bed, and, turning the key of the locked door, escaped into the passage. There she met the priest, who had heard her cries.

"Hide us, for God's sake, hide us !"

"What is it ? What is it, woman ?"

"There, there ! look in the room !"

He opened the door, and looked. There was nothing unusual in it ; it was undisturbed, neat as it always was, with the sunlight pouring through the window.

"Sure, there's nothing there at all."

"You will hide us, father ? You will not give us up ? For the love of God and His Saints, you will not let him near me ? Come away, oh, come away ! let us hide somewhere."

He led her to his room, and locked the door. She pointed to the open window; he closed it and latched it. The boy, trembling in every limb, cried "Mother, mother!"

The father was bewildered, and gazed in silent inquiry at the panic-stricken woman and child.

"Do you hear him? Do you hear?"

"Sorra one do I hear but the boy crying," said Dermot.

"What is it at all, at all, woman?"

"He is dead! They told me so. He must be dead, he must be!"

"Who? What in the world are you talking about?"

Then the tension broke; and falling into a chair, and covering her face with her apron, she broke into wild, passionate weeping.

Dermot attempted to soothe the boy, who was trying to reach his mother, but could not. He took him up and placed him by her side, and then left the room. He heard the key click behind him.

Bridget was in the kitchen, separated from the house by some distance. He went to her, and inquired what all the trouble meant.

"Have ye seen any one about?" he asked.

"Do ye mean that murderin' villain, Yanakee Jack?" she queried.

"Oh! and what's he doing about here?"

"'Deed and I don't know, except it's for some mischief or another?"

"Did he speak to you?"

"Yes; he said he'd been after kangaroo all day, and asked for a cup of tay."

"Did you give it?"

"Give it? Of course I did. Didn't ye tell me many a time never to refuse bite or sup if we had it to give? An' the taypot always on the hob, too!"

"Did he say anything?"

"Oh, nothing, but that maybe he'd frighten a stranger in the house as he passed, but he meant no harm. Devil doubt him! It's harm he'd do if he got the chance, for all his lies."

"Has he gone?"

"Yes, off he went when he had the tay."

So Dermot returned to the house.

The evening meal had none of its usual accompaniment of bright chat. The boy was not present, and his mother sat at table mute, with terror still in her face.

After the cloth had been removed she asked the priest to give her an audience in his room. He did so; and, an hour later, sought out Bridget again.

"Did that fellow ask Mrs. Clifford's name?"

"To be sure, now I think of it, he did."

"Well, what did you say?"

"What should I say but the truth?"

"Yes, Bridget, of course—so I suppose you told him all about her?"

"No, indeed; I just said her name was Clifford, and that she lived in Sydney."

"Well, what did he say to that?"

"Oh, nothing much; only that Clifford was a very nice name, a very nice name; and I said it was indeed, and asked him if he took sugar in his tay, and he said he did, and I said, 'Help yourself,' and sez he——"

"Oh, may the Saints bless you for a long-tongued woman! Good-night. Oh, by the way, I forgot, Bridget. Would you mind helping Mrs. Clifford to pack to-morrow? They are returning to Sydney."

"Well, that's short notice, anyhow. Sure, I've killed a goose for the Sunday dinner."

"Ah, well, we'll have to eat it ourselves. Go they will

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—goose or no goose ; not you, nor I, nor the whole world could hold them back after to-day."

"Very well, yer Rev'rence," said Bridget obediently ; but, for all that, she was sorely puzzled, and concluded in her own mind that it was "a mighty quare business."

CHAPTER XXIV

THE months that elapsed since Mary's return to her home had developed a new life for her. New, in a subtle sense, difficult to define. Her daily occupations were much as they had always been since her marriage; but she was conscious now of moving in an atmosphere of affection that had before been foreign to her home. As she felt her husband's love daily intensifying, noted it in little acts of attention, the caress that was no longer perfunctory, she realised that Temple in these later days was drawing her close to him in a sense she had once despaired of. If only she could have forgotten! But now, the love she had craved for brought her no peace, only poignantly bitter pain. In the old complaisance, the merely formal life of marriage, she could have found weapons to beat back the assaults of conscience; but now, with his awakened love meeting her eyes at every turn, she was powerless. In those other days she had been to him merely a woman, neither better nor worse than her sister women. She had known it; she who had desired to be everything in his life had known that he deemed her just so much dearer to him than other women as a wife is conventionally recognised to be, and no more. Had he not said to her, what more could she want? Dear God, what more! How could he understand, and yet ask "What more"? Ah! if she had only waited patiently, in the hope that, by beating her love against his heart it would open to her at last! But, despairing and reckless, with the fever of revolt in her veins, she had cast loyalty to the winds; so, when the love

that had been longed for came to her, she met it with her own stained in dishonour.

He could not fail to sometimes see that she shrank from him. The very truth of his affection repelled her. She could not meet it with equal truth, and every instinct of her nature recoiled from meeting it with a lie. If once, as now, he had come home to her night after night, with the love-light in his eyes setting the warm, lingering pressure of his lips upon her own, the day would have been filled with the desire of his return. Now she dreaded the sound of his voice in the hall; it meant the daily degradation of self. It was never absent from her, this secret that some day would surely come to light. Waking from sleep it would steal through the dimly conscious brain to stab at her heart.

As the days went on, she clung to the hope that perhaps a way out of the misery and shame that wrought within her would come from the pains of motherhood to which she was hastening. Even if all traces of her treachery could be hidden deep as the depth of the mid-sea, could she return to the self-respect that had held her head high in the old loveless days? Would not the child—the innocent little one—draw in dishonour from its mother's breast? Could life ever be now as it might have been? The old, vain cry to be given back yesterday, to blot out the writing of the "moving finger" with her tears! Conscious of the folly of repining, she not the less repined. The chronicles of broken homes that find their place in the daily newspapers, had a new and personal interest for her, as she built up from the terse lines of the reports imaginary stories of temptation and repentance.

One night, scanning the columns of the evening paper, she involuntarily uttered an exclamation of pity.

John raised his eyes from the book he was reading, "Why 'poor thing,' *chérie*?"

"Oh! I did not mean to say it aloud, dear. It was only an incident, commonplace enough, I dare say, in the courts."

"Courts are the home of the commonplace. But what was it that moved your pity?"

"It was in the Divorce Court. They took the woman's child away from her."

"You mean gave the custody to the husband? Well, I suppose that was right. Who was the sinner?"

"The woman."

"Well?" and Temple raised his eyebrows slightly as he gave the word an intonation of surprised inquiry.

"Oh, nothing, John; only it seemed hard, hard even if the woman had—had sinned."

She paused. "Why is it that people, society, the world, are so unforgiving to a woman for this sin, and men who sin, not once nor twice, but it may be year after year, are forgiven so readily? The world—just laughs, and it is forgotten. But the woman—there is no forgetting for the woman. It does seem unjust, John."

"Oh! in some respects the law to-day professes to treat the offence more equally between the sexes; but underneath, at the base of society, there is a sufficient reason why the faithless wife should suffer. The man's offence may be condoned, but on the purity of the woman rests the whole fabric of the family. Do you understand?"

"Not quite, John."

"To put it tersely, I, the man, must be assured that the boy who will some day fill my place and take my estate, is my own—a breach of faith by the woman must, for society's sake, be punished heavily. Society, the family, the transmission of property, are not affected by the man's *lâches* in the same way. The offence of the woman saps the foundation of her husband's home."

"Before God the sin is the same in both, surely?"

"That may be, dear, if one can have any idea of what constitutes a sin—in the hereafter. For practical purposes and in this world we regard it as an offence against society. A lawyer's work, you know, *chérie*, deals with laws—that is to say, rules of custom or of legislation, more or less clearly defined—mostly less, or there would be fewer guineas in our pockets. The domain of morals belongs to another profession. Law may incidentally be moral, or it may not be—at least not in the higher sense. Its sole purpose is to regulate society. Now do you understand, sweetheart?"

"Yes, but it doesn't make it any easier for the woman. The child it refers to—is that her husband's child, or the other?"

"Oh, the husband's of course. As to the other—if there is any other—poor little devil, she may have it and its handicapped life for what they are worth."

"It must be a terrible handicap?"

"Yes, they make it pretty heavy on the outcast as this world goes."

"She would love the child all the more."

"She would have need to. I remember, years ago, a youngster telling me out of the pain of his heart, remembering his schooldays—the average schoolboy has no bowels of compassion—and the askance looks of later days, that he felt like cursing the mother who bore him—bastard as he was. The world is a slave to conventions, my dear, and petty souls love servitude. But let us change the conversation. It is getting rather gloomy, is it not? Did you try that new song I brought you yesterday?"

She played the new song; but a little spectral face—timid and pain-filled—looked at her from the blurred page.

In these days, Temple, by his patience with her variable temper, his keen, inner sympathy with the moods of depression that came to her, added unwittingly to the burden of her trial. He, on his part, waited with anxious anticipation for the realisation of a hope that had been revived on the verge of its extinction. A man's life is extended beyond the horizon of self in the life of his child. The evening of the one is the dawn of the other. If a son were born to him the link with the future would be complete, and the transmitted ego would fill its part in the life of the great nation of the South that would be in the years when he, John Temple, had returned to the dust.

The child was born. It was a son ; and in the languid surcease from pain, with the tiny life at her side, Mary for the time forgot, in the sweet, new sense of motherhood, the secret that had for these long months lain close at her heart.

John, as he bent over the bed to kiss her face, white as the pillow against which it was pressed, murmured words of love in her ear. She caught the words, "our little son," and then the past returned to her. She felt the muscles of her face grow rigid, and, despite the will that tried to force it back, a groan slipped through her lips.

"Are you in pain, dear?"

"A little, John—just a little. Don't bother, dear. It is nothing, nothing at all."

After Temple had left the room she asked the nurse to bring a light close to the child, and then looked searchingly into the little face, whose eyes stared fixedly at the flame.

"It is bad for him," said the nurse, solicitous for the babe.

"You may take it away. That is all."

She drew the infant close to her again, and lay there

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motionless as if in sleep, with one word beating on her brain. If ever there had been doubt, it was gone now. Would John ever see what she saw? Would the truth grow clearer day by day, till from the child itself would come the proclamation of their shame?

CHAPTER XXV

THE air was filled with the scent of flowers this warm, sunlit morning ; and to the mother, in the lassitude of convalescence, it brought a peace of mind which had been absent for many days.

The hum of the distant city but served to accentuate the quietude of this spot, which, in a closer sense than it had ever done before, appealed to her as home. In a cradle under the shade of a tree the little one slumbered peacefully. Mary, in obedience to an instinctive love for the open, kept the child in the air as much as possible ; she also gave it, as far as she was yet able, her personal attention. This morning the nurse had gone to town to make some needful purchases, so she and the child were alone.

Seated in the deck-chair beneath the tree through whose foliage the sunlight dappled her loose wrapper with broken light, she let the book she was reading rest on her lap, and half closed her eyes in a languor of blissful content. It was enough just to live on such a perfect day as this. The French windows of the house, opening on the broad verandah with the trim-cut lawn beyond, made dark, cool spaces for the eyes to rest on after the glare of the massed flowers that filled the garden with patches of colour. On the further side of the lawn, a belt of shrubs shut off a portion of the grounds as yet uncultivated, with its indigenous trees and patches of thick, unmowed grass, making a sheltered and secluded retreat. Here, in this untouched corner of primeval scrub, Mary could imagine herself back in the bush at Woollawillie.

It was a new experience to her energetic nature to rest thus idly in a content born of physical weakness. Her eyes closed, and she fell into a light sleep, out of which she was wakened by the voice of a servant, who handed her a visitor's card. She mechanically took it. She was now fully awake, and held the card listlessly in her hand.

"The gentleman said he wished particularly to see you."

She looked at the card, and as she did so, the dulled senses quickened into life.

"I, I cannot see him—cannot see any one yet, Jane. Did you not tell him I am not to see any one?"

"Yes, ma'am; but he said he was an old friend, and was leaving Sydney to-night. He was sure you would not refuse."

She was silent, and the maid waited.

"Am I to give him any message, ma'am?"

"Yes, you may tell him he can see me—here."

A minute later she saw Jim's tall figure coming towards her. A few seconds later he was standing before her with uncovered head, the light shining on his bronzed face, filled with compassionate love for the woman who held out a thin, white hand to him.

"Jim! Why are you here?"

"Have you not heard?"

"Heard?" she repeated vaguely; and then her face lit up with sudden recognition and sympathy. Ah! yes, forgive me! I am only waking out of dreamland, Jim, and for the moment I forgot. A woman's life becomes so self-centred at this time—and the boy—"she looked at the child in the cradle.

Jim's eyes followed the glance, and were held in fascination.

"Poor 'Maman' is dead!"

"Yes," he replied mechanically, his eyes still held by the

cradled child. He made a nervous movement as if in half restraint of the emotion that seized him ; then yielded and impulsively kneeling on the grass, bent over the cradle.

"The little chap !" he said, drawing a deep breath ; and his face looked up at hers, transfigured with a boyish eagerness. He bent again, and touched the baby cheek with his lips.

As he knelt there, seeing the son born to him, blind to all else, murmuring "The little chap ! the bonnie little chap !" she rose and moved to his side, and let her hand rest on the curly hair of his bent head. Forgetful of self, she saw only the father and child linked together for these few seconds—and her heart ached for him. How could he bear the burden her hands would place on him—her hands and "the little chap's" ?

He rose, and turned to her frankly, with resolution writ large in the bright eyes, the tense muscles of the mouth, the poise of the head.

"Mary, let us face it. He is our boy, ours, dear. I've enough to take us away. Let us face it. It's a cur's game to skulk and hide. Just face it, dear, for the little chap's sake."

"The little chap's sake ?" she slowly repeated dubiously, gripping the frame of the chair for support. "His or ours, which ? And what of John ?—it would kill him, the pain, the shame of it, and"—she could scarcely frame her lips to the ugly word—"the treachery of it—if he knew."

"Yes," he assented grudgingly, "it's rough on Temple. I'd kill the man who did it to me ; by——I would !"

"And John ?"

"Oh ! he's mad enough, he'd do the same if he could—if he knew. Look here, Mary, I'm sick of all this underhand work. I want to get straight again. Let me meet him. Then we'll go away with the boy."

"Get straight, Jim? Can we ever do that? We can't turn back, you know. Think, think what it would mean to him and the boy."

"He's my little chap, and I want him," said Jim doggedly; "and you're my wife, or—" with a flash from the underlying brute—"you ought to be!"

She recoiled as if he had struck her on the breast. "Oh, Jim! how could you? how could you?"

All the glamour and romance of their sin fell off, and it stood there ugly before her eyes. He had put it in the plain words of the street.

Jim's face lowered, as he hardened his heart in bitter obstinacy against the appeal in her voice.

"You—" but the scorn that shone in her eyes, and curled her lip, checked his words.

"You coward!"

Then the shame of his words tingled through him from head to foot. "The woman tempted me." Son of Adam!

"Mary, forgive me. I am mad; forgive me! Oh! let us get rid of this tangle, and face it. I'll take the punishment, if you'll only let me."

"Take the punishment? How would that help? Do you think that by any stripes laid on us we could wipe it out? Do you think we could wipe out the pain and shame from John's life? Do you think any punishment of us could make our child as other children are in the sight of the world? There is only one thing to do, Jim; only one thing we can do."

"Well?"

"To hide it; cover up the past; shut it away; never breathe a word of it, lest a whisper should let out the secret to the world."

"I'd rather face it and have done with it."

"You may face it, but you cannot have done with it."

To face it seems manly, in a way ; perhaps it would be, but what does it mean to the rest of us? To face it would be a light way out to you—but think of what it would mean to the others.”

Then Jim began to see whither it all led. He would have to skulk in silence, cut off from the woman he loved, and a stranger to his child. Punishment, openly given and wiping out the offence, a readjustment of the balance, he could face ; but this other thing, to live a lie, to hide himself lest his presence should harm the lives of others, was the sentence of a leper, not the punishment of a man.

She sat down, bending forward to rest her chin on her hands, and looked at him. He had thrown himself on the ground, and was moodily plucking at the stubbly blades of buffalo grass.

“Jim, let us talk it out, and settle it once and for all. I want you to understand it as I have pieced it out, little by little, in my own mind, trying to find a reason, not an excuse, for what has been. When I married John, I wanted to be so much to him, in every way, to share his life to the uttermost. I was flattered by the consideration he gave me, dazzled by a dream of the social power that is so close to every woman’s heart, and—it is so hard to express—I wanted the completion of life. I was young, healthy, normal, and God gave passion to woman as He did to man. I wanted love, the warm, human, passionate love that has been from the beginning. Well, it somehow, some way—I cannot explain it as I felt it, but it was not there. John was so good to me, it became a daily reproach to me. I had never counted on any question of personal attraction or repulsion, but it was there. His kisses fell cold on my lips. He looked at life as a critic might regard the construction of a play, but to me it was a human document, and its ink the red blood of physical life. Had

I been his intellectual equal—and I was not—still that equality would have failed to satisfy me. My need was the lower, physical one that, after all is said and done, is the true complement of the lives of men and women. We had no child, and, as the years went by, the woman in me rebelled against the shame. Hide it away as she may, the barren woman is shamed in the faces of other fruitful women. How I longed for a child! How I dreamed of it, and slowly came near to hatred of the husband who gave me cold and formal affection, the mere ritual of love, when I wanted love itself!”

Jim had ceased to tug at the blades of grass, and he looked up at her intently.

“Then I went back to the hills, and you came again into my life, with all that masterful, physical side that had been lacking in it—and the rest followed. I had left a husband, in the conventional sense; but when I returned, it was to find a husband who had become a lover. As the months went by, and with the knowledge of the child, a sense of completion in my life, of the satisfaction of the law of sex—perhaps one might call it—came to me, and the—Jim, do not look at me like that!” and she covered her face in her hands, and waited till she could control herself.

“Well?” he asked, in a husky voice.

“Life became different, in a way. It was not—was not——”

“Was not what?”

“Was not as in the day— Don’t ask me to say it, Jim.”

“Your love of a season went with a season, eh?”

“Yes.”

He rose. “And Temple?”

“He is my husband, and I love him. I, his disloyal

wife, yet love him ; daily I love him more and more. He was always good, kind, generous—and I am happy with him.”

And Jim stood rigid, with pain-strained face, the bitterness of death at his heart. Then he spoke in a hard, dry voice—

“Since we played together as children, Mary, I have had no thought of woman but you. I loved you then, I love you now ; I shall love you till I die. God !—woman, you look at your heart and piece it out like a toy-puzzle. Love !—what do you know about love, when you stop to pick it to pieces and put it together again. I love you ! I care not why ; I know not why ; I ask not why ; only, I love you—I love you ! Mary, my sweetheart, come with me, dear, come with me !”

He knelt at the side of the chair, and tried to remove the hands that covered her face.

“If you love me as you say you do, then prove it.”

“Prove it ? I will prove it with my life !”

“Then put it to the test, Jim ! As you love me, shield me ! As you love me, shield our little one from the breath of shame ! As you love me, Jim Hungerford, my old play-mate, my lover of the dear old hills, as you love me, spare my husband !”

The first cool breath of a coming southerly storm rustled through the trees and shrubs with a shiver in their leaves, as Jim knelt motionless and silent at her side.

Mary stretched out her hand and drew the cradle near her ; then taking in her own the big, rough-skinned hand that rested on her knee, gently placed it near the child, and put the little chap's tiny fist in it. Jim thrilled at the touch. She whispered, “Swear it !” and he said, “I swear it !” as his hand closed round the child's.

There was nothing more to say.

For Hungerford the end had come. Freeing the baby hand, he bent over the cradle and murmured, "God bless you, my little chap, and send you better luck than that your father had!"

Then he rose. Mary stood before him with face uncovered, and paler than the arum lilies in the outer garden.

"May I kiss you?"

She lifted her face, and he kissed her lips.

"Good-bye."

"Good-bye. You have left Glenfyne?"

"Glenfyne has left me. Thank God, it lasted out her time! It is sold up, and done with—and forgotten. No, damn it, I can't forget it!"

"You are going away?"

"Yes, out west—Bourke way."

"I hope you may have great fortune, Jim, and some day find great happiness."

"Thanks," he said laconically, and turned to go. He passed through the trees, and she followed him to the break in the shrubbery, where she could see his tall figure cross the sunlit lawn, and then pass into the darkness of the house.

CHAPTER XXVI

"THERE was a fool once," said Jim to himself bitterly, "who said 'Young man, go West.' May the crows pick his bones! West is the point of the compass where hell lies, and the cry of Dives ceases neither day nor night, crying 'Water! water!'"

He was on the back of a half-starved station hack, down by what had been a water-hole, now a stinking morass of dead sheep.

The country was in the grip of drought. There was nothing edible on the face of the land. The last bit of salt-bush had gone, the scrub was lopped bare, and the sand-drifted country spread out like a sheet of brass beneath the staring, cloudless sky. As to Jim, he bit the stem of his pipe, and cursed inwardly. It was a comprehensive curse, or series of curses, that covered the whole span of his life. What particular end his Maker had in bringing him into the world, and dogging him all down the years with such unspeakable luck, passed his understanding. He cursed the whole plan of a universe which could stretch a man out from his youth to the grave on the rack of pain.

From which it will be seen that Jim was in a bad way. What little had remained over after the sale of Glenfyne had been put into this venture in the West. And this was the end of it! It might rain to-morrow till the country was under flood, and the rabbits took to the trees—where there were any trees or any rabbits—but it wouldn't matter to Jim. It might interest the bank directors in Sydney;

and in the churches there would be references to the fact in terms complimentary to the Deity; but it wouldn't interest Jim any more.

He was a "broker"—a stony "broker"—stripped as clean as the bones of the dead sheep that were scattered over the acres of the thirsty land. So this morning he cursed. It was a cheap luxury and had a seeming satisfaction in it.

In grim irony he totted up the number of sheep he had "shored" the season before last—last season. Now their bones were scattered over the plain. Five years of his life gone, and with them the last of the Glenfyne capital! He rode across the burnt up, waterless plain, unbroken save for a ragged tree here and there, and the long line of wire-fencing that marked the boundary of the run. Thank God, it was his last day in this desolate country! That night he would make for the railway line, and Sydney.

When he reached the men's hut, a rouseabout met him and handed over the mail; a letter from the bank—letters from the bank made up the bulk of the mail at any time—a couple of newspapers, and another letter addressed in a familiar scrawl. The letter from the bank could stand over—what did it matter? But this other letter! All the devil in him glowered in Jim's face as he tore open the dirty envelope that enclosed it. It was a short and curt epistle. The writer handled the pen with difficulty, and was no stylist. For three seasons Jim had paid up instalments of the hush-money to Yanakee—the third year a few pounds only, with promises of more—the last season, promises only—and now even promises had ceased. Yanakee was in Sydney, and there was to be a new deal of the cards with a new partner. The letter gave him seven days—a period of time that had a legal association with the police courts.

He laughed bitterly at the assumption of an official ultimatum, then thrust the paper in his pocket, with an oath for company. What did it matter to him? Let them go their way? Why should not the rest pay as he had done?

After tea he packed his belongings, took a stretch in his bunk, and smoked. He looked round the dreary humpy in the dim light from the evil-smelling lamp. What a dog's life for a man! And he thought of Temple's home and Temple's wife, with envy and self-pity. But after all, Jim had a very thorough contempt for the man who whined—whether articulately or in the maudlin self-pity of introspection. The lapse from grace was momentary; and as he smoked, the peace from his briar-pipe—that peace which passeth all understanding of those who know not the blessed weed—came to him. Life took to itself a kindlier guise; and the trinity of envy, hatred, and malice was exorcised.

As he lay with half-closed eyes, and dreamily restful, memory, that so mercifully blurs the darker part of our lives, carried him back to the hills, and in the hills to the woman he had loved, still loved, and ever would love.

In the vivid picture he seemed almost to touch her—the unfailing comradeship of her childhood, the bright, merry eyes, the frank laughter came back to him. Then later, the wild night and the sin of Lancelot—was ever sin more sweet? The awakening in the grey morning, and with it the long repentance for the betrayal of a trust, the mean-souled sin that came between them and the light. Later, he could feel the baby hand in his. The little chap, "God bless him"! That was five years ago. He could talk now, and call Temple "father." And through it all he saw the mother's face, her eyes looking into his, and her lips repeating, "Shield us, Jim! shield us!"

Yes! and he jumped up abruptly, with purpose fixed. What, in the long sequence of years that numbered their way out of the mist of the past into the mist of the future, what did a life or two matter? Who would of his "coming or departure heed" more than "the seven seas should heed a pebble cast"? What was death but the coming of One who said "Rest"?

Yes, he would shield her! God! how beautiful she was that night, with the firelight on her face, and the long silken hair streaming over her shoulders! Well, life had been worth living after all, if only for that one sweet sin; and he would pay its price—aye, cheerfully.

The resolution come to, half the burden of life seemed to slip from him. As he drove the mare to the railway station he enjoyed in anticipation Yanakee's reception. He would have his answer within the time. The love of battle was not yet dead in Jim.

Arrived in Sydney, he counted the few notes that stood between him and an empty pocket. Some few shillings short of six pounds. During his five years' life in the back blocks he had let his beard grow—it saved the trouble of shaving. He had it and his hair trimmed, and exchanged his soft felt hat, with its greasy leathern strap, for another less conspicuous in the city. In a slop-made sac suit of grey material, alleged to be all wool with the lie writ big on it, he fitted into urban life with just sufficient hint of constrained ease to mark him out as a stranger to its streets.

To the station manager whom the bank had sent to fill his place, he wrote an ample letter touching certain matters of business connected with the run. "I am leaving to-night by boat for Brisbane, and then on to Rockhampton; there I'll get back into the cattle country. I'm full up of sheep, thank you. Wish you luck, old man." He chuckled to himself. The "old man" was a youth from the head

office who was going to run the station on strictly business principles. "Strictly business hell"! murmured Jim to himself. He signed the letter "Yours faithfully, James Hungerford"; and looked at it with head aside, as he thickened the dash to the final letter. It was the last time he would sign it or own it. He put up at a lodging-house where "clean beds" were advertised at ninepence a night, and said that if any one called for James Blake, well, he was the man. No one did call for James Blake.

On the morning of the second day after his arrival he went down town and loafed along King Street, paying particular attention to the contents of the lollie shops. At last he entered one, and addressed himself to a pasty-faced girl with pinched features and a quantity of dull, hay-coloured hair, frizzled to the extreme of art.

"I want," said Jim, with a painfully acute impression that he was "playing the goat," "I want some first-class lollies in a box with a horse on it."

"Chocolates!" said the young lady emphatically. "If you look through those boxes you may find a horse. Here's one with a lamb; perhaps that would do?"

"No," answered Jim decisively. "I wouldn't touch anything with a lamb on it, not with a tongs, miss."

"Camels? leopards?" she inquired, turning over the boxes. "I suppose it's for a boy?"

"Yes."

"Oh, here's a horse!"

Jim looked at it critically. The picture showed an animal with a beautifully curved neck, a highly intelligent head, with an eye full of dramatic fire, brilliant vermilion nostrils, and such a flowing tail!

"Real circus breed!" said Jim critically. "Fancy riding into Bourke on him! Is that as near nature as you can get for the money, miss?"

Miss evidently thought this was familiar, for she replied coldly—and to her mind it settled the matter—that they were English chocolates and the best quality. So Jim paid the money, and departed with the box in his pocket.

He had an adventure on hand. The smallest affair in the way of adventures one could think of. Just to find, if find he could, a child. Yet it was on his nerves, as though he were a schoolgirl thinking of a lover.

He walked through the city to the outskirts of a suburb ; and as he turned into the street where the house he sought stood in its grounds, he remembered a day five years ago, and a "little chap." It was an odd chance, just an odd chance and no more, that he might get a glimpse of him. All the night before, on the "clean bed" at ninepence, he had lain sleepless, recalling the past, and feeding the hunger of his heart with this odd chance. Of the mother he dared not hope to gain even a glimpse. There was a point beyond which he could not trust himself—but with the child it was different ; he would come unknown and go unknown.

Fate did not favour Jim. He passed and repassed the house, then walked in weary repetition along the pathway by the high brick wall that enclosed the garden. The street was a quiet one, and the shadow of this wall, topped with the out-reaching branches of the trees within its enclosure, was grateful to him ; for even in this autumn season the midday sun shone hot.

He made occasional detours by intersecting streets, only to return with the craving at his heart unsatisfied. At last, with a sigh, he turned cityward ; but before half the distance had been accomplished, turned again, unwilling to abandon hope.

"Perhaps in the afternoon," he thought. As he neared the place again, he became conscious of a forced attempt

at appearing unconcerned. If any one had seen him in the morning, and now saw him again, how like a skulking thief he would appear! And Jim reflected on the queerness of life—that a man should sneak in this shamefaced way to steal a glimpse at his child.

"I never set much store on kids in my time," he said to himself, "but it's different when it's your own." And the thought of the little soft fist that had lain in his hand that one day was close at his heart.

He drew back with a start, his wandering thoughts recalled, as a fir-cone fell at his feet. He looked up the wall and saw a movement in a branch that stretched across the parapet. Then he stood stock-still, and in the silence caught the suppressed chuckle of a childish voice. Jim looked about him. There was a loose brick in the wall that, displaced, gave him all the foothold he needed; and in a moment he had drawn himself to the top and looked down into the garden on the other side—looked full into the mischief-filled face of a hatless, shoeless, curly-pated youngster.

"Hello, sonny, what's the game?" said Jim, as coolly as he could muster. After all, even to the gods come moments of compassion. He saw his boy.

"You aren't coming down, are you?" said Wilf, with a touch of apprehension in his voice as he looked up at the big-limbed man on the top of the wall. "There's a dreff-d dog in here, he'll eat you up—he will, really!" with emphasis on the "really."

"Dogs!" said Jim. "Oh! I don't mind dogs—the more dreadful they are, the more I like 'em. What's your name, sonny?"

"Wilf."

"Mine's Jim. Now we're introduced."

There was something reassuring about this matter of an

introduction—it put matters on a more conventional footing. Mother often talked about being “introduced.” Perhaps he was a proper kind of man after all, and Wilf plucked up courage.

“All alone, Wilf? Mother away, eh?”

“She’s in town.”

“Nurse having a good time, eh?”

“She’s left, and mother’s gone to bring a new one. We often have new ones, quite often.”

“Variety is the salt of life, eh, Wilf—even touching the matter of nurses?”

To this the youngster had no reply.

“When I was a kid,” said Jim to the fir-tree musingly, “I used to play Injuns—Mohocks and Ojibbeways. I was mostly a Mohock, and more often than my turn Pathfinder. Ever hear of Pathfinder, Wilf—bit young yet, eh?”

Wilf confessed ignorance by a dubious shake of the head.

“We were great on adventures. Roamed the trackless forest and the undulating prairie in an acre plot. We had real blood-curdling war-whoops. Got a war-whoop, Wilf?”

Another, but less dubious shake of the head. He wasn’t a wicked-looking man, and his face had in it something like mother’s—just at times.

“You can’t commence too soon to have adventures,” purred Jim, with the one effort of his life to assume the guile of the serpent. “It isn’t every boy I’d go on a venture with—but I like you, sonny. Dear me,” said he abstractedly, and again addressing himself to the fir-tree, “what a time we would have! And we’d be back by tea all right, and”—he was about to add—“no one would know,” but here his guile stopped short.

"You'd tell mother?" queried Wilf, with a tone of hesitancy in his voice.

"You'd tell her."

"She'd be sure to 'ject, I know she would."

"Just this once, Wilf. We'd be back by tea. But perhaps you're afraid?"

"I'm not afraid, but mother would 'ject; I know she would, truly."

"I'm a very old friend of mother—if she knew, she would not object, Wilf, not if she knew, just this once."

"True?"

"True as mother's love for you, laddie."

Wilf looked him very solemnly in the face. He felt no fear of this strange man perched on the wall—and he liked his face.

"I'll tell her the moment we come home. You're sure she won't 'ject?"

"Sure."

"Wait till I get my shoes and I'll—I'll go," and he drew a great breath. It was a mighty 'venture. Then he vanished through the splashes of madder and golden bronze, for it was the season of chrysanthemums.

In a couple of minutes he was back at the tree with hat and shoes. He clambered up the tree and reached the wall, looking down on the other side where lay the 'venture.

Jim swung on his hands, and dropped to the ground. He held out his arms. "Jump, Wilf!" and the boy leaped into them.

It was six o'clock when they got back. The gas-lamps were twinkling in the streets. Wilf was dead beat, and trotted wearily along with his hand in the big clasp of his new friend. It had been a wonderful 'venture. He couldn't count how many "goes" there had been on the

merry-go-round ; and a long procession of donkey-rides raced past his tired eyes. Now the fear of mother 'jecting loomed large, and to Jim, with the warm little palm in his, the parting larger.

They stopped at the gate under the light of a lamp in the silent street.

"Good-bye, Wilf."

"Good-bye, Mister Jim. You don't think mother will 'ject very much, do you? Couldn't—couldn't you tell her, Mister Jim?"

"There are some things, Wilf, a man's got to do off his own bat ; no one else can do them for him. You're a brave little man—and must do it yourself. Everything, Wilf, straight and true to mother."

"S'pose we must say we are sorry?" looking up at Jim from the corner of his eye.

Jim thought it advisable on grounds of general policy.

"Won't do it any more?" Another interrogative glance.

"Never again!"

Wilf regretted forcing his partner's hand so far.

"Tell mother that I'm sorry—no, I'm glad. You can't know how glad, sonny, how could you? Well, say I couldn't help it—she'll understand—and I'll never do it again."

"For ever never—or—or—only sometimes never?" and there was wistfulness in the young voice—for it had been a glorious 'venture.

"For ever never! Good-bye!"

As Wilf went up the carriage-drive he wondered why Mister Jim had stooped down and caught him in his arms and kissed him. Men don't do that—so father said.

Jim, as he stood for a moment at the barred gate that shut in home, saw the boy vanish in the dim light, the box—the box with the wonderful horse—tucked under his arm.

“Forever—never!” How the familiar words rang in his ears! And Jim, as he turned cityward, with the night closing about him, looked up at the grey-clouded sky, thinking of that “horologue of eternity” that—

“Sayeth this incessantly,
Forever—never!
Never—forever!”

CHAPTER XXVII

FIVE years had been added to Phil's life. He was now twelve years of age, and though life would never be to him what it was to other and robust lads, still it was not without its prospect. The spinal trouble which had crippled him in childhood was not wholly overcome, nor ever could be ; but the visit to the hills of five years ago had been the turning-point in his life. The shadow of a hope had been realised. He had taken in with the pure air of the ranges a new life, and a desire to live that in itself acted as a tonic. How much also he owed to Dr. Dick it would be hard to say ; but it was a deep indebtedness. The withered hopes of the old bachelor's youth had sprung to new being by their transference to the boy. He had declared that he would make a man of him. The limited possibilities of the fragile life had, however, caused the Doctor many a brown study. The choice of a career in such a case was painfully circumscribed. At last he had decided on journalism—within limits, and had arrived at this conclusion on grounds of expediency. "Ye can do it mostly sitting down," and in Phil's case this was important.

In his early days Sheldon had eked out a precarious income with a pen more noteworthy for florid periods than reliable data. As a matter of fact, his knowledge of the craft was limited. In the Doctor's opinion the Press of the day was a slave to "sordid facts."

"A fact, sir," he remarked to Phil, whom in moments of didactic oratory he addressed as though he were a class

under professional instruction—"a fact, sir, is like a Chinese lantern—a paltry piece of paper till you put a light in it, and then it becomes a thing of beauty. Imagination, my boy, is to a fact what a candle-end is to your Chinese lantern. Cultivate your imagination, Phil, my boy, and the facts will take care of themselves. It's the picturesque treatment of sordid facts that makes the journalist, begad! Once, in my salad days, it was my lot to be cast in a bit of a gold-digging town, and I, wanting for bit and sup, looked up the editor of the local newspaper. He said he'd put me on for a week, as the reporting staff wasn't very well just then. It was after the local races, do ye mind? 'Now,' says he, 'I like lots of "pars" in my paper. Devil take your solid stuff; break it up, my boy, break it up!' I looked out through the dirty window on the straggling street. There were two men, a boy, and a goat in sight, and in the innocence of my young heart, I said, 'Where's your pars round here?' 'Pars?' says he, 'Why, man alive! the place is full of them. They're floating in the air and under your feet. Ye've only got to catch them!' 'Begorra!' says I, 'ye can't make bricks without straw.' He grinned at me, and says, 'What do ye think a newspaper's for if it hasn't any news?' And then I tumbled to it like a bird. That morning, my son, I brought in six paragraphs with devil a fact in them. Oh, man alive! the pathos I got into the police-court, and the humour I managed to wrestle out of an inquest! It would divert you entirely. I stayed on that job for a month, and had a world of enjoyment out of it, till I got into a bit of trouble with the town council, and the police magistrate, and the local hospital committee, and the inspector of police and a few others; so the editor says one morning, says he, 'It would be a pity, Sheldon, to destroy your prospects by keeping you on this bit of a paper any longer,

talents of such an elegant order want a wider field. Ye must let your maiden meditation roam fancy free, Sheldon, and a place like this, with no soul beyond the price of mining-stock, is beneath the dignity of your genius,' says he. So he paid me up and I lost my job. In these elementary communities," said the Doctor, thoughtfully stroking his chin, "the imagination is very stunted. They worship a fact like an Indian idol, without the votive gift of flowers."

Then he set Phil a lesson.

"Now, how would you treat a trifle like this? An old biddy, whose language would do credit to a corporal of Marines, has a mangy cur for which she hasn't paid any dog-tax; and they have her up and fine her, say, a shilling. Now, there's a test for ye. A soulless vagabond would miss all the opportunities of a domestic tragedy and a lovely par. But the man of imagination, the artist, Phil, how would he treat it? Well, I'll tell ye. He'd treat it pathetically; for here the elements naturally lend themselves to pathos. An old woman, a dog, and an iniquitous tax. There's your theme. I'll just dictate it to you.

" 'A tall and respectable-looking old lady, dressed in deep mourning'—have you got that? Maybe it's a steeling old bombazine skirt, but that's where the art comes in— 'in deep mourning, was summoned for not having her dog registered according to law!' Here ye might throw in a reference to Nathan and the little ewe lamb. Maybe it wasn't a ewe, but that's near enough. Ye can work that up after. Well, are you ready? 'The inspector called upon the poor creature, and found her with an old dog that had just enough vitality left in him to wag his tail to his mistress.' There's your picture of the dog. Ye might touch him up with a moist eye, full of years and devotion. Now for the tragedy. 'The dog was not registered, and

his aged mistress could not afford to pay the fee. There were but two courses open to her : either to pay, and that she could not, or kill her dog, the companion of many solitary years of life. After a painful scene with the inspector, who confessed that he had been much moved by the distress of the old lady, she burst into a flood of tears, and at length reluctantly consented to take the latter course.' Here ye might work in a trifle about her clasping the decrepit pet to her withered breast. Just think it over. 'When she came before the Bench, the good woman's hands trembled as she stood up.' Perhaps ye might make more of her tremble, but that's a matter of taste. Where was I? 'Stood up straight and ladylike' (the suggestion of gentility is high art, do ye mind), 'and pleaded that the dog was a very little one, and quite old, but—and here the slender frame shook with suppressed emotion.' Ye might mark, Phil, that suppressed emotion covers a multitude of detail, and is also art. Then ye might add, by way of light and shade, something brief and business-like. 'She was fined one shilling, and two-and-sixpence costs.'

"I remember writing a par like that in the old times, and the day after the editor received half-a-crown for the old woman from 'A lover of dogs.' I gave it to her, and she was locked up for being drunk and disorderly that same day—more power to her elbow! Now," said the Doctor with emphasis, "that's what I call journalism—a mere sordid fact illumined by the imagination."

How much of this course of instruction was light and leading to Phil, and how much enjoyment to the Doctor, it is difficult to say; but in after years Phil said that it at least left in his memory a series of delightful pictures of his old friend, at perhaps his kindest and happiest moments.

Mum's narrow path of daily duty had been made less rough in these later days. Mary's interest in her had not died the premature death of so many interests of a like kind among her class. Emotions easily stirred are as easily lulled to sleep. Not so with Mary. The effect of her first realisation of the struggle for existence in the undercurrent of humanity that flows ceaselessly, and for the most part silently, beneath the surface of things, remained with her. Nor was her sympathy confined to this isolated case. There were many other pinched and feeble lives who had reason to call her blessed. Temple, who in the closer intimacy of their increasing love had come to know the secrets of his wife's heart, realised not only the beauty but the truth of the Christian philosophy of self-sacrifice. It seemed to him, when he watched the brooding face of his wife, with thought intent on some simple act of human helpfulness, that at such times it wore a fairer beauty than all the gifts of the world could bring to it. Under the influence of these days of quiet home life he felt within himself the growth of a wider charity. His outlook on life became mellowed and less self-concentrated.

They were happy days. The boy grew apace, and, as he grew, knitted his life into Temple's. Year after year drifted by without a breath from the past to disturb their tranquillity. The mother had found rest in a haven of fancied security. She let the dead past bury its dead. Peace had been reached at last, though not without hours of pain at heart. The face of Jim, the wanderer, came to her for many a long day in dream and reverie; but the memory of the past grew dimmer and dimmer as the days went by, till now it was becoming apart from her real life—one of those odd, fragmentary memories that flit through the brain as of a life lived at some pre-natal time.

She still kept touch with Doctor Sheldon, and he found a growing tolerance towards him manifested by Temple. Indeed the latter, in an unostentatious way, had, when opportunity came to him, sent a sort of backwash of prosperity on the Doctor's fortunes. It was this, indeed, that helped the latter to bear up against added years, and an ever-increasing Bar of younger rivals.

A Spartan-like simplicity of life had enabled him to educate Phil. What the education cost Sheldon no man knows—but himself, nor realised what it meant when a sixpence, fingered in a pants' pocket, played the heroic part between Phil and the bottle.

So it was that, whilst the whirr of the sewing-machine still sounded in the little home, the grey wolf of necessity ceased to bay at its door. Ends had still to be so adjusted that they met, but they did so without the one-time sense of despair. Indeed, despair could have no resting-place where Doctor Dick set his foot. Like the sun, he drove all mists away. Was "Mum" a little anxious as she looked at the frail boy and thought of the life before him, the Doctor's knock at the door dispelled her anxiety. Out of the crippled life he would build a master of words who would move the world to tears or laughter at his bidding. Journalism was the stepping-stone, but beyond it lay the craft of the novelist. "Ah, it's a great world ye are going into, Phil, my boy! Just think of it! Just think of all the poor souls ye may brighten up, the bit of tenderness ye may put in many a heart, the trifle of consolation ye may bring to them that need it! May the devil pursue me, but I envy you! To get hold of sordid facts, and paint them with the glories of the rainbow—man alive, it's the work of an archangel!"

So, toward the work of an archangel, Phil plodded

long nights and with floundering pen. The boy was learning "shorthand" as a humble instrument to the end in view for him; and he and Sheldon became companions on all sorts of evening excursions to lectures and services of one kind and another that would furnish practice for the student. The Doctor, on such occasions, composed himself seriously to sleep during the entertainment, whilst Phil sweated laboriously on the mystic signs that had afterwards to be translated. It was disheartening work. Many a time he felt like giving it up in despair. The Reverend Ebenezer Jones would be well into his discourse whilst Phil was still wrestling with the text; or the gentleman who lectured to entranced audiences on "Pig-Sticking in the Far East," would be in the middle of his second anecdote whilst Phil made a frantic effort to get the pig into the first.

But the stress of the note-taking was mere play to the stress of trying to make something intelligible out of the pages of scrawled strokes and curves. The glory of the future to which the good Doctor's finger pointed was very far off, and Phil was little more than a boy.

However, it was not all work. Sometimes they would take a night off for the play, and then there was no sleeping on Sheldon's part. It would be difficult to say which enjoyed these treats the more. The Doctor's soft Irish heart was easily moved, and he would weep down the red courses of his nose into the recesses of a smoke-stained moustache over the distresses of the woman with a past who bewailed the loss of appetite for the present. These entertainments were followed by a repast of cakes and coffee. Then Phil was taken home, and the Doctor went to his "diggings" religiously sober—except on the odd occasions when an old crony came across his path and temptation beset him—a not unwilling victim.

After such falls from grace, Sheldon would console himself with the reflection that, after all, a capacity for doing the wrong thing argued some merit in even a defective resistance. "There's nothing in being a teetotaller from choice, me boy," said he; "the true grace of God is being a teetotaller when ye don't want to be—and, begad, it's often I don't want to be."

These absences from home frequently left "Mum" alone. Once or twice she had joined the theatre party, but it was rarely that the exchequer showed a sufficient balance to its credit to enable her to do this with a free mind. "True for ye, ma'am," said the sympathetic Sheldon, "it's the tender soul ye have entirely that cannot rejoice, with the milkman, and the grocer, and the butcher sitting astride it. It takes a Celtic soul to rise superior to unpaid bills, begad!"

One night, sitting in the solitude of her home (which now consisted of the flat of three rooms—the living room, and her own and Phil's bedrooms), she let her thoughts wander down the years.

Twelve months after Phil's birth she had come to this house, and there, in that very room, had fought a bitter fight for their two lives. The very thought of it made her shudder; the long, long hours of work; the miserable pay; the parcelling out of every penny; the sweater's fines that were paid out of the life of the child and herself; what would it have ended in but for Mary and the Doctor? What? Yes, she knew! On the flat above her had dwelt two sisters, women who had grown gaunt and old and silent in the bitter struggle. Two days ago the coffin of one had been carried down the narrow staircase, followed by a solitary mourner, weeping, not in grief, but in envy of the peace and the rest that had come to the worn-out sister. The room was vacant now; and

"Mum" thought with a tremor of the black, silent space where, only two days ago, the dead had rested. It was very lonely. She wished Phil were back. It would be good to hear Sheldon's cheery voice bidding him "good-night" at the street door. Hark! there was some one at the door now. It must be they. She went out on the landing. How old and nervous she must be getting to be easily upset like this. She looked down the black, yawning space of the stair-way. Surely it must be Phil. Then she heard a match struck, and its blue flame, far down at the bottom of the stair-case, lit up the face of a man. She gasped, and put out her hand to the wall lest she should fall headlong down.

There was a step on the stairs, heavy and slow. With the quickness of thought she was back in her room, and with trembling hand turned the key in the lock. She stood there straight and rigid, with a face ashen-white and ears alert, listening to the heavy step that came slowly nearer and nearer. Now it was at the landing. It was at the door. Her strained ears could hear the breathing of the man in his momentary pause. God help her! Had it come at last, after these years of fearful waiting, the footstep on the stairs—the footstep she had heard in her dreams, waking her with fear clutching at her heart in the silence of the night? It paused. Then she breathed again, as the step went on and upward.

The vacant room was taken.

When Phil returned he found their sitting-room empty and his mother's door closed.

"Have you gone to bed, mum dear?"

"Yes, Phil."

"Are you ill, mother?"

"No, Phil; no, only tired, deadly tired, dear. Go to

bed, and when your light is out I will come and kiss you." She dared not show him her tell-tale face.

Phil went to bed and waited her coming. It was odd for "Mum" not to wait up for him. She always sat up. He never thought of what it often cost her, the waiting up when every limb and nerve cried for rest. Then, tired out himself, he fell asleep.

She came at last; and morning broke to find him breathing in the regular cadence of youth's deep, sweet rest; but no sleep had come to the eyes of the woman who knelt at his bedside, with her head on her arms, and the grey-streaked hair hanging about her shoulders.

CHAPTER XXVIII

JIM was of the order of men who go down to the sea in trams. He knew a steamship from a sailing-vessel, and there his sea-craft ended ; but he had a passionate love for the open ocean spaces ; and now that trouble was upon him he almost instinctively made his way to them. There was a heavy sea on, and the spray dashed high above the cliffs at Coogee.

He gave a shrug of disgust at the thought of the grimy rat-hole in which he had spent the night. What a queer world it was, that men should wrestle and strain just to own a cubby-house in which they could lie pent, cut off from the life-giving air of Heaven !

The cat's life of the women ! The dog's life of its men ! More cushions and more houses—was that the beginning and the end of things ?

Weeks afterwards he could scent the sea-weed in his nostrils, feel the stinging dash of the salt spray on his cheeks, and see the silver line that broke the grey distance where sea and sky kissed. Beyond lay dreamland. In that early morning pilgrimage Jim found complete rest of mind and body. When at last he rose to turn citywards, and knocked the ashes from the old briar-pipe that had served him many a day, he stretched himself in the luxury of physical living, with arms outspread to the sea and its breakers. "Ave, Cæsar !" he said, with a grim smile on his face, and turned to the work of the day. What the work would be—what it might be—was but dimly defined in his mind. But not the less was his purpose set.

"Shield us, Jim!" His thoughts went back to the day of that appeal, the face of the woman full of love—but not for him—and the little chap, the wee, bonnie little chap; how soft and downy the cheek was when he knelt and kissed it! What a time they could have had together, as the child grew year by year! "Father!" What it meant to a man after all! How the word clipped on one's heart! If only it could come to the son some day that he had tried to redeem the shame of his mother and the blot on his name! Ah well, that was the sort of thing one craved for, the hoped-for reward that underlies the acts of men.

The first thing was to see Yanakee. The due date had come.

He reached the city, had breakfast, and then consulted the letter for the address given.

He found the house without difficulty and made inquiry, as he had been directed, for "Jack."

"Left!" said laconically a frowsy old woman who apparently kept the house.

"When did he leave?"

"Last night, and took his swag with him. Is your name 'Jim'?"

"Yes."

"Well, he left a letter for a man named 'Jim.'"

"No other name?"

"No, I arst him if there ain't no other name, an' he swore, an' said that was his business, and he wouldn't have no woman pryin' into his affairs; that 'Jim' was good enough. Here it is, Mister."

He took the soiled envelope from the woman and opened it. It gave a new address.

"Thanks. That's all right; it's for me. He's an old pal I want to meet."

"You don't look his kind, young man," said the old dame, and then added the gratuitous advice, "I'd pal up with some one else, if I were a likely sort of young chap like you—take an old woman's advice, dearie."

"Thanks, Missus; you mean well, but you don't know, you see." And he departed.

The next address was some distance away, and with an odd impulse to put the meeting off and make the most of this one day, he determined to postpone the visit till night-time.

He spent the greater portion of the day in the Botanical Gardens and the Art Gallery; the critical examination of a number of landscapes in the latter interesting him keenly.

"A new chum dropping in here to take a few pointers on colonial scenery would think the whole land a blooming Paradise," he said to himself. "Why, to look at them, you'd think you couldn't sit down on a dry spot. Such fat stock! such woolly sheep! such milk and honey generally! Such 'hell and Tommy! Art in this colony is bounded by the sea on the East, and the Blue Mountains on the West. Sand and salt-bush don't run to Art—not much!"

The longest day comes to an end, however reluctant we may be to part with it. Jim saw the evening close in with the feeling of one whose holiday is over, and before whom lies a task that he approaches with unwilling feet. Across the harbour the houses built among the rocks, with terraced gardens, caught the last gleams of the sun on windows that shimmered in the haze of departing day like fire-flies in the mangroves of the northern rivers. The white-sailed boats came drifting up among the quickly moving ferry steamers. The bugles sounded on the men-o'-war lying at anchor off Garden Island. Yes, it was the

close of the day, and he wondered idly where he would be that time to-morrow ; whether his eyes would ever rest again on the beautiful picture on which the curtain of night was being dropped.

He rose from where he had been resting on the grassy slope by the water's edge, and made his way into the city.

In Hunter Street the shops were closing, but he was in time to purchase at a cutler's a keen-edged sheath knife. He fixed it on the leathern belt about his waist, and slipped it round till the coat concealed it.

At eight o'clock he reached the house to which he had been directed. On the threshold of the doorway Yanakee was standing. They met as if it had been so arranged.

"Well?" said Yanakee.

"Well?" said Jim. "You expected me?"

"Yes ; I thought maybe you'd come to-night. Time's up, ain't it?"

"So you say. Hadn't we better go inside?"

Yanakee gave a nod of assent, and led the way up the steep staircase to the attic room. Its furniture consisted of a stretcher bed and a couple of chairs, one without a back serving as table for a candle-stick. Yanakee lit the candle. Its light seemed only to accentuate the darkness of the room.

Jim filled his pipe and passed the pouch to Yanakee.

"Have a fill?"

"Cut-up" was a luxury to Yanakee, who stowed away the plug he was about to fill his pipe from. They smoked in silence.

"Been down long?"

"Few days."

"Sold out?"

"Sold up."

"Hell of a country, ain't it? A sheep to fifteen acres when there ain't a drought! Lovely country!"

"Curse the country! Out with it! What have you got to say? You don't tan your hide in the Never-Never, not you, my man."

Yanakee grinned maliciously.

"Don't seem to me, Mr. Hungerford, you do so much for yourself, eh?"

"Well, what is it?"

"What is it? Well, it's just this. I want a settlement, and spot cash at that. What's your offer?"

"Offer? I've no offer."

"What about the agreement, Mr. Hungerford? It's a long time since I've seen the colour of your money, and I'm—well, sick of it. But no man can say I don't play a square game. I've stood by my part, and now I want to give you fair warning that I'm on for another move. If it weren't for old times, Mr. Hungerford, I'd have done it long ago. This ain't a palace, is it?" and he looked round the wretched room. "Well, I've had enough of this life, and you can't expect a man to go on playing your game for ever. Are you going to pay, or can't you? That's straight!"

"I paid as long as I could. Well, now I can't, and if I could I wouldn't. I've had enough of this — black-mailing."

Yanakee's eyes glinted viciously at the word "black-mailing," but he smoked on silently, till Jim again broke the silence.

"Well?"

"Well, that's all I've got to say. I reckon I know the move."

"You'll make no other move!"

Yanakee laughed derisively. "Why, it's a gold-mine—

nice, respectable woman like Mrs. Temple, with a husband that's like to be a Judge any day—why, she'll pay till she has to steal, if she ain't got it."

The brute was right. She'd pay; wreck her life, her honour; lie; thief. God! what wouldn't she do to save the boy! He was deadly right.

Yanakee had been sitting on the stretcher, and Jim on the unoccupied chair. He rose, and walking to the door, turned the lock and pocketed the key; then, facing about, said quietly—

"I've no particular desire to 'hump my bluey' on the celestial track, Yanakee, if you understand what that means. Life's good enough for me, and I'll have it if I can—at a price. But a man may pay too big a price even for life—and I'll swear you don't understand that, you sneaking blackmailer! Oh! let your knife alone, man; two can play at that game. Sit down! Down, I say! If I could see any other way of shutting your mouth I'd take it willingly, as God is my witness, but I don't—and I take no chances. Sit down! You dog! Ah! would you?" And he sprang on him with the snarl of an animal. The dim, yellow light of the candle glinted on the bright steel blade of the knife as it descended.

Mum, sitting in her room alone, where she had been all day with a fear at her heart that paralysed action, heard the two men go up the staircase. Their feet shuffled on the floor above, and then silence followed, broken only by the murmur of voices. Suddenly there was a hurried movement, a noise as of something soft, but heavy, falling, a muffled cry, and then again silence.

The clock on the mantelpiece ticked with a quick, businesslike sound, intensifying the stillness. She watched the hand mark five, then ten minutes, and still the silence above remained unbroken. The sense of anticipation

became unbearable; at all costs she felt that she must leave the house, or she would go mad. Not a sound above. Hark! What was that? The click of a lock—a footstep on the stairs. She would go mad, mad! The place was stifling; she could not breathe. If only Phil were home! Would he never come? He ought to have been back an hour ago. She had so dreaded the night-fall. To-morrow they would go away. Half her household goods were already packed.

With nervous fingers she fumbled at the lock to escape, and threw the door open. As she did so the light lit up the landing, and before her, with hands outstretched to feel the wall, crept stealthily past the figure of a man, who turned on her eyes that seemed to shine, wide, staring, awful. The neck of his shirt was torn; a broken watch-guard, glittering in the light, caught her eye.

A moment, and he had passed the landing into the shadow of the stairway. She reeled back into the room, and fell on the floor. Half-an-hour passed before she returned to consciousness and was able to drag herself to a chair. There she sat, incapable of effort, her head fallen backward, with eyes staring vacantly on the white ceiling. As she recovered, wiping the clammy sweat from her face, her eyes were fixed by a tiny blurr on the space above. She watched it with the idle inconsequence of a mind blank of thought. It was at first the size of a sixpence; then it might be a shilling, she thought; now, a half-crown or a copper, for it was dusky brown in colour. Suddenly, the fact came to her, and she sat up rigid, with fear tightening the skin on her face. She saw the centre of the disk condense, grow pendulous, and fall. It plashed on the floor.

Staggering like one in a drunken bout, she crossed to the door and flung it open. Again the light fell on the

landing, but the silent, stealthy figure was gone. On the boards a tiny object reflected the light. Was it everywhere? She stooped to test it, shuddering as she did so. The trembling fingers touched only a bit of metal—the half of a lucky sixpence. She picked it up mechanically, and then fled, hatless and cloakless, into the street, her dry, voiceless lips trying to cry aloud “Murder!”

CHAPTER XXIX

"I SEE," remarked Temple to his wife at the breakfast-table, "that they have arrested a man on suspicion for the murder. He was caught at Redfern Railway Station, where he had purchased a ticket for the South."

"The South?" said Mary, with a note of languid interest in her voice. It was the train she caught on her occasional visits to her old home. "From the little I read of the report, it seemed to be a brutal and purposeless murder. What do they say the man is like?"

"Oh, young, athletic, apparently intelligent—with some education. Seems to be one of that class of shiftless fellows with a good start, who often drift into the ranks of the rouseabout. Did I tell you that I had received a commission to act as Judge at the next Gaol Delivery, the Central Criminal Court? I shall probably have to take the case: he was committed to-day."

"In the last commission you had you were fortunate in having no capital cases, John."

"Yes! I don't know whether it is so with other men, but it's a duty that, honestly, I shirk. The first sentence of death tells on every one, I suppose. After a while it all comes in the day's work."

"It is an awful duty!"

"It's one of the occasions when one feels a spark of thankfulness for the palladium of British liberties. After all, it rests with the jury."

"But they are guided by the judge, are they not—in his summing-up?"

"My dear, in nine cases out of ten, the jury have made up their minds long before the judge sums up. It is a traditional observance, but, like many other traditional observances, of no great practical value."

"What is the man's name?"

"James Blake."

"Is anything known about him or the motive for the murder?"

"Absolutely nothing. He appears to have recently come down from the back-blocks—where is not known. They found a note in his pocket addressed to him, making an appointment with the murdered man—at least apparently so, for it bears no signature. It seems, however, to have been identified by the woman whose house Blake visited that morning, and where the murdered man was staying."

"What was his name?"

"The woman knew him as Hawkins. That also is the name he gave, but so far no one has identified him."

"Poor Mrs. Clifford! How dreadful that it should happen in the same house!"

"Is that the Mrs. Clifford you take an interest in—the mother of Sheldon's protégé?"

"Yes, did you not know? Don't you remember my telling you?"

"Perhaps, dear. It slipped my memory."

"She was found lying on the footpath unconscious, and was taken to the hospital. I called to inquire about her to-day, but they fear some brain trouble. Poor creature! As though she had not suffered enough misery already!"

Temple rose and tossed the morning paper aside. He had yet half-an-hour to spare, and before starting for the city he invariably spent some time with Wilf in a game of romps in the garden.

"He is growing a fine, sturdy little chap, dear; tall, straight, and broad-shouldered; he'll be a better man than his father. It is the vigorous, healthful blood of the bush-born that tells, isn't it, sweetheart? You have brought me a son who will gladden my eyes as well as my heart, dear." And he put his arm around her, lover-fashion, and kissed her "good-bye" for the day.

Temple's enthusiasm as a politician had been damped since the early days of his career. He found that all along the line the ideals of his early life were cribbed, cabined, and confined by expediency and compromise. He had regarded polity as an academic abstraction—the laying down of broad principles; he found it a chess-board, whose pieces were facts, the rules of the game being based for the most part on a knowledge of average human nature. Politics had been his one emotional ideal. At all other points life to him touched the individual, and the individual he did not err in overrating; but the State had meant to him something beyond the individual. He soon rectified the initial mistake of taking politics too seriously, and on too high ground; and ended in the error of refusing to treat them with any degree of seriousness at all. Temple missed the happy mean. He declined to take things as he found them; and his political brethren on their part resented the doctrinaire, who spoke with the voice of one speaking "ex cathedra." Up to a point he had been an opponent to be fought or to be reconciled; a supporter to be considered; but eventually the party to which he nominally allied himself hesitated placing in office a man whose allegiance to ideas might be greater than his allegiance to the Ministry.

The underlying ambition of his life—to play a great part in the federation of the Colonies into United States, Dominion or Commonwealth—weakened also as his in-

terest in provincial politics waned. His disdain for the detail of the latter finally cost him his seat; and thenceforth he concentrated every effort on his profession.

As an advocate he was logical, lucid, penetrative; and in the atmosphere of the Court he found an environment more congenial to his taste than the cosmopolitan air of the Assembly. He looked with a degree of confidence to his ultimate translation to the Bench, to which repeated commissions as an Acting-Judge pointed. The personal factors of appearance, address, voice, play their part, and not inconsiderable parts, in the attainment of success at the Bar. These he had, and added to them the advantage of an independent income since his parents' death, and a wife who united to personal gifts the accomplishments of an admirably tactful hostess.

Vaughan, on his occasional visits to the city, never failed to look up his old chum. Sometimes Sheila accompanied him. The family at Woollawillie had been increased by the birth of two daughters. Sheila had not lost any of her early humanitarianism. She was still as prodigal of gifts of heart and hand as in the old days. The cares of maternity had brought no wrinkles to her face, and her laugh was still as ready as her hand. At Woollawillie shew as the "Lady Bountiful" of the hills, and Susannah's jam-factory, by her deputation, still circulated its sweetness. Mary and she were drawn closer together by the link of their children.

There still floated in Sheila's mind a vision, somewhat inchoate however, of perpetuating the memory of Susannah, deceased, by some scheme of philanthropy. She had from time to time set herself seriously to the task of embodying the idea in tangible form. Vaughan would sometimes return to find her wrinkling her brows over magazine articles, seeking a solution of the difficulty.

"Oh dear!" she would exclaim wearily, "is there anything really good in this world? Everybody, it seems, who tries to do good ends in doing mischief, poor things! Here's a man who says that popular education just adds another pain to the life of the many. Then this other says, 'the patching up of defective lives is a mischievous interference with the law of Nature. The unfit have no right to survive.' If you give a shilling to a beggar you manufacture a pauper; and if you pay too good wages you interfere with economic law; and that, of course, is very dreadful. Then if you don't give servants leisure, you drive them into factories; and if you drive them into factories you deplete the market for domestic help. What is one to do? Is there anything good under the sun, Eric?"

"Well, my dear, it is still left to us to eat, drink, and be merry."

"That's a man's view. What I want to do, Eric Vaughan, is to let others have a turn at the table."

"Gather up the crumbs, eh?"

"No, sit down and eat with the rest of us."

"A socialistic dinner-table where all eat equally and produce unequally, eh?"

"More difficulties, more difficulties! I believe I'll die before I find a way."

"Take my advice, little woman: let the big schemes go. Cultivate your own little corner. It is the cultivation of small allotments in philanthropy that tells in the long run. You see, if it's too large, there's not enough individual sweetness to pan out over the lot; you harden into a board of directors, a secretary, rules and regulations—wherein dwelleth neither sweetness nor light."

"I'll ask Temple," she decided at last. "He's a lawyer, and ought to know a way out of the difficulty."

"If you knew anything of the craft, Sheila, you'd know

that law is the open door into difficulties, not out of them. These be all vanities of vanities. Hold fast to the little corner, wife."

Another occasional visitor was the Rev. Luke Fennel, who, in obedience to the mandate of his Bishop, had been translated from the cure of souls in the hills to a cure in the city. It was not an important parish. The parson had neither the distinction of person nor the gift of oratory to warrant his appointment to a fashionable church. He ministered to the spiritual wants of a poor and scattered congregation; the stipend was all too precarious, but the parson's wants were few. Once a year he took a holiday in the hills, where energy was recruited for the city struggle.

Temple found the visits of the parson somewhat a trial of patience. The Rev. Luke had very little to say on these occasions—as, for his part, Temple's cigars and his own pipe sufficed. The only occasion upon which his host succeeded in really tapping the parson's reserve of communicativeness was after a recent visit to the annual dog show. Fennel discoursed sweetly on dog, and with much learning as to pedigree. Now, to Temple, dog was simply dog and nothing more; whereas to the parson the lamest dog ever helped over a stile held a world of interest. On this occasion he uttered the only reflection on womankind to their dispraise that Temple ever heard him utter. It was probably suggested by the sight of the pug he had presented to Mary years before. The pug now waddled, reposed on soft places, and was disgracefully fat.

"When I see a woman and a dog together," he remarked, "my respect for the lady is tempered by regret for the dog."

Only once did Temple touch upon matter of the parson's profession. He did so tentatively, alluding to a recent *Nineteenth Century* article.

"After all," said Fennel, in his jerky manner, "what does it come to? Putting new clothes on God doesn't alter essentials. Cults don't matter; old concepts under new names, eh? What does matter, always will matter, is that religion should touch life—give it fibre; and you can't, as the average man is constituted, have that sort of fibre without an ultimate hope. Everything goes smash," he added, as he filled his briar, "when you face blank despair. God is—must be—an economic factor in the everyday life of man—including the man with the crucible."

There it ended; but Temple afterwards recalled this odd coin from the parson's spiritual mint.

It was while the evening newspapers were still spinning their columns out of the meagre details of the murder, and setting up one theory of motive to-day in order to upset it to-morrow, that Vaughan ran down to town on one of his visits. He dined with Temple at his club—they both had work to do later in the evening. In the smoking-room, seated in a snug, secluded corner, they had coffee served, and settled down to a quiet smoke before parting.

"Have you ever dropped across Hungerford in town?" asked Vaughan.

"Hungerford?" repeated Temple, trying to recall the name. "Ah, yes! I remember. The universal 'Jim' of your parts. No; why do you ask?"

"You must have heard of the cropper they came—some years ago now?"

"I think I did hear of it at the time."

"Well, he left our part and came down here. I did hear that he'd gone out West somewhere."

"Going out West is rather vague, isn't it?"

"Yes; it swallows up a lot of human material—good,

bad, and indifferent—does the West. I'd almost forgotten him till to-day, when curiously enough he was recalled to me by—what do you think?"

"Oh, I can't guess."

"Well, the picture in the evening paper—atrociously smudgy it was too—of Blake, the murderer, you know."

"Well, I ought to know; he will be brought up for trial to-morrow."

"By Jove! of course, you've got the case. Sorry for you, old man. That sort of thing would get on my nerves."

"Well, what's the association?"

"Oh! only some curve in the face, or the generalisation of the features. Seemed familiar to me. Curious thing, association, Temple. Poor old Jim! it's a bit rough to link him by a fanciful resemblance to a brute of that kind."

"If you like to stay a day I'll get you a place to-morrow where you can see the original of your fancied likeness."

"No thanks; not all the legal circuses in the world with the ruddiest gladiator would tempt me. I'm due back to-morrow. We start mustering next week, and there is no end of work in view."

"Is it paying?"

"Just pays its way, Temple, and no more. We're too far from the market, that's the truth. Why didn't you get us a railway when you were in politics? When the old couple go hence we shall come nearer civilisation."

"Is that synonymous with the greater happiness?"

"Touching the matter of club dinners, it certainly is. As to the rest, well, that is as it may be. The wife's bonnet is still the home of the philanthropic bee. Susannah's money, with a mythical responsibility attached to it, still disturbs the little woman's mind or her emotions."

"In a woman they are one. There is no dry light for a woman's facts, is there, Vaughan?"

"You see, when money comes to you through the distribution of a product, you are hampered by association. To the heir of a mustard man, the cruet suggests pensive thoughts tempered by complacency. Well, she cannot look upon the harmless, necessary pot of jam without being conscious of Susannah's memory. Now I must be off, old man; but some day, some day, mark my words, you will have Sheila in your midst, with a mission and a large family—neither unmixed blessings, by the way."

The following day, when Temple took his seat in court amid the rustle of rising gowns, he recalled the conversation with Vaughan; and when the prisoner came into the dock from the depths below, he looked critically at him whilst the jury answered to their names. He could but dimly recall Hungerford, whom he had only met on a few occasions; yet, though the mental picture was hazed, there seemed to be some lingering resemblance between the two faces. Such resemblances were not uncommon.

The court was crowded with idle spectators—women as well as men; the one possibly about to die has a fascination for folk in the street and out of it.

James Blake was duly arraigned on an indictment that he had feloniously and maliciously murdered one John Hawkins, and being demanded concerning the premises in the said indictment how he would acquit himself, said that he was not guilty thereof, and put himself upon his country. The jury, having been duly sworn to "true deliverance make," settled themselves comfortably in their seats and prepared to hear the opening.

The crown prosecutor got on his legs with a sigh—he would be on them most of the day—and casually remarked, as he placed the voluminous sheets of brief

before him, "May it please your honour, gentlemen of the jury——"

The judge examined critically the point of a new goose-quill, bit it, was satisfied ; entered the title of the case on the blank page of a new note-book ; and the trial began.

Counsel had been assigned to the prisoner. He was youthful, and inflamed with a desire to get his man off just for the glory of the thing—the glory to the junior counsel. The more difficult the case, the greater the glory. It was difficult enough in all truth ; for, though the evidence was wholly circumstantial, it was deadly strong. There was the testimony of the woman who gave him the note ; of the man who sold him the knife—how Jim had cursed his folly in leaving it behind !—that of a neighbour who had seen him at the door with the man afterwards murdered—of Mrs. Clifford, who had identified him as the man she saw on the staircase. Then there was the knife with the cutler's brand ; the scrap of paper found on the prisoner, and identified as the note given to him that morning ; the traces of blood on his clothes ; and here the junior counsel and the Government analyst set out to sea on an argument about red and white corpuscles, and the blood of a man and a guinea-pig.

And Jim listened to it all with a sort of impersonal interest, as though it were some other poor devil whose life was at stake. When he had been brought into court the previous day he found himself face to face with Temple. It was a shock, and he was glad to rest his hand on the shelf of the dock till he got over it. He did not so much fear recognition, for it was years since they had met, and then only once or twice ; it was the grim irony of the thing. He had not dreamed of this ; and yet it had come about, and in a very ordinary course of events. For the moment it seemed hard to realise that he and

Temple should run on such parallel lines, with an issue between them that touched the interest of each so closely. Time after time he found himself, with a curious sense of power withheld, looking at the sallow, studious, clean-cut face of the judge. The sense of it held him up through the long-drawn trial, held him up as the feeble hope of escape dwindled away in the cold, passionless linking together of the chain of evidence.

The junior counsel's address was wearisome, inconsequential; the peroration twaddle. But what could a man do with such a case?

Temple summed up briefly, connecting link to link, yet noting every flaw that might weaken its strength. They were to give him the benefit of any doubt, if there were any doubt. That was the end of it; and the jury filed out of the box to their room.

There they occupied a large portion of their time in complaining of the inadequate provision made for their accommodation, and expressing disapproval of the waxy potatoes and watery cabbage served up by the sheriff's order for the evening meal. When the doubtful repast was over, the foreman, cutting the end of a fat manilla, lit it and remarked casually, "'Spouse we're all agreed, gentlemen?"

An ultra-conscientious juryman, who had spent a large portion of time in the box taking copious notes, when not nervously biting the end of his pencil, said that what puzzled him was the want of motive.

"If you want my opinion," said the foreman, as he sent up luxurious clouds of smoke, "we ain't here to worry about motives. Evidence is the thing, gentlemen, evidence. You don't try a man on motives; you try him on evidence. That's law!"

"Yes, but—" began the nervous man.

"Look here," said a fellow-juror, "I was here all last night, and I don't want to be here again to-night. I'm a family man, I am; and I want to get home."

"Yes, but when a man's life is at stake, you know," said the nervous juror.

"If there was the faintest shadow of a doubt, I'm with you," said the family man; "I'd stay here for a week, wife and kids nevertheless notwithstanding; but I'm with the foreman. What we've got to do is to go by the evidence."

"That's the law!" repeated the foreman. "What do you say, gentlemen? Guilty, I say; not a doubt of it; a cold-blooded, diabolical murder!"

"Guilty," murmured the others; and the nervous man took refuge in the voice of unanimity.

They filed into the court. The arrangements for lighting courts were not then on a scale of electric magnificence. Feeble gas lights, dotted here and there, lit up the body of the hall. The gallery and the recess beneath it were in gloom; but one could hear the movement of the crowd, and here and there the yellow light fell on an expectant face.

"Gentlemen of the Jury," said the associate, "are you agreed on a verdict? Is the prisoner, James Blake, guilty of the charge with which he stands indicted, or not guilty?"

"Guilty!" said the foreman.

"Gentlemen of the jury, you say the prisoner is guilty. So says your foreman; so say you all." Then he turned to Jim—

"James Blake, you have been charged with feloniously and maliciously murdering one John Hawkins, to which you have pleaded not guilty. The jury have found you guilty. Have you anything to say why the court should not pass sentence of death upon you according to law?"

There was again expectant silence in the court. It was one of the dramatic moments of the entertainment. The gallery and back benches greatly enjoyed these moments; they had the thrill of a play in them.

Jim made no reply.

"Silence!"

The judge cleared his voice, for the culminating moment of the day's drama had come. There was a rustle in the gloom, and then settled attention.

Temple pronounced the sentence of death in a grave, unemotional tone.

The court rose; the crowd bundled out. The warder touched the arm of the prisoner standing motionless in the dock, gazing at the empty bench, as if unable to realise that this was the end.

"It's all over, my man. Come along!"

He obeyed listlessly.

That night his quarters in the trial yard were changed for the cell "upstairs," in that "via dolorosa"—the corridor leading to the scaffold.



CHAPTER XXX

LADY CULLINGFORD-JENKINS' "afternoon" was the first Wednesday in the month. Her visiting list was a long one, and consequently the callers were numerous. These afternoons had become a weariness of the flesh to Mary, but she was punctilious in the performance of social duties. It was one way in which she could help Temple. She often thought, with a half-humorous, half-pathetic retrospect, how short the realities of the woman's life fell of the girl's anticipations. Where were the dreams she had dreamed in this same garden when she linked her life to John's? Aye, and where were John's? Was there really something, as she had in these maturer days speculated, was there really something in the atmosphere of domesticity that robbed life of its strenuousness? Was isolation an essential of great achievement; and absorption in the lives of others the easy way to individual extinction?

Sir Robert, in his ponderous way, had hinted to her his party's disappointment at Temple's political career.

"My dear," he remarked, joining the tips of his spatulated fingers, "the one absolutely necessary qualification in a successful politician is loyalty to party. Now, I don't say that John is not loyal in the ordinary sense of the word; but loyalty, as we men of affairs—practical units in a practical society—understand it, means more than that. It means ah—the ah—the ah—submergence, so to speak, of what the young men nowadays call the ego in the ah—cosmos, so to speak."

"You mean—er——"

"Yes, yes, of course ; I mean that you must sink the—er—merely personal, private opinion, and rise to—er—the opinion of your party. To be able to trust your man is everything in politics. Now, I pride myself that, no matter how indifferent the subject might be to me personally, and whether I entered the House just roused from a nap by the division-bell, I could walk unerringly to the right side of the House. Believe me, that is a gift that has its own reward. Look at me, my dear. Her Gracious Majesty has been pleased to bestow honour on me ; I am—er—universally trusted ; I—er—hope equally widely respected ; and it is due, my dear, to loyalty—loyalty to my party, my class, myself. Now that's where Temple fails. He has a most unhappy knack of inspiring uncertainty. To play the critic to one's own party is—well—is, my dear, simply political annihilation. It is a fatal weakness in a young man. No man can afford it, least of all a young man with his spurs to win."

"But, Uncle Robert, the right of private judgment in matters political as well as other matters is almost a sacred right, is it not ?"

"Oh, yes, yes, certainly. Private judgment is one thing, my dear, and public judgment quite another ; and public judgment in politics is—er—the judgment of the party, the party as a whole."

"'When all were for the party, and none were for the state,' " misquoted Mary.

Sir Robert looked at her dubiously, but said nothing.

To herself Mary summed it up. "John has a conscience, and it is for sale neither by wholesale or retail." And she honoured him not the less but the more that his spelling of loyalty conflicted with Sir Robert's. But, alas ! she admitted, out of her little store of worldly wisdom, John's spelling was not the accepted one.

Lady Cullingford-Jenkins' love for society freaks had not waned; and the quiet amusement Mary extracted from enthusiasts of one kind and another at these "afternoons" was to her the one redeeming feature in their dulness.

"My dear Mary, why don't you take up something? Why, even poker-work is better than nothing. Every woman wants an interest, my dear. Life is simply full of interests to me."

"What is the latest, aunt?"

"My dear, at present I am wrapped up in zenanas."

Mary was puzzled, thinking for a moment that it might be some new kind of underclothing. Then she remembered.

"Oh yes; the emancipation of Indian wives, of course. But do they want to be emancipated, aunt?"

"My dear, that has nothing whatever to do with it. How can they possibly know till they are emancipated?"

"And made dissatisfied."

"What was it, my dear, somebody said about a divine discontent? Dissatisfaction is the beginning of all wisdom," replied Lady Cullingford-Jenkins, preening herself on a happy retort.

"Then one ought to be glad there are so many wise folk of one's own sex," said Mary, with a sigh.

But her aunt, seeing as through a glass darkly, deftly turned the conversation by a dissertation on the excellent artistic effects obtained by the use of pastels; and then introduced her to a travelled lady, Miss Lucille Diggles, the talented author of "Snowflakes from the North," and "Autumnal Leaves from the Apennines," who was in the course of circling the world in a record number of days, with the ultimate view of publishing her impressions. She had already got as far as the title, "Sub-tropical Grains from a Gleaner's Basket," oblivious of the fact that gleaners don't glean in that particular way, when they glean at

all. She eagerly seized the opportunity of making some notes.

"I suppose," said Miss Diggles, "the day has passed when the burghers have to guard against the incursions of the—er—blacks, I think you call them?"

"Oh dear, yes," replied Mary; "the only incursions they make nowadays are upon the Government blanket-stores."

"Dear me!" said Miss Diggles, raising her eyebrows and making a note. It appeared in the gleanings later on: "The most recent raid of the wild races of this interesting country was upon the Government depots for blankets, established, probably on the outposts of population, to supply this necessary of life to the nomadic shepherds tending, as in the old scriptural days, their flocks by night."

"I overheard an interesting conversation in the railway-carriage to-day," she remarked, "from which I gathered that the three principal varieties of sheep in Australia are the merino, the wether, and the cross-bred—the last, I presume, a corollary of the others. May I take that as correct?"

"You had better consult an expert," said Mary, confusion struggling with laughter.

Subsequently, after a moment of abstracted reference to her notes, Miss Diggles abruptly remarked, "I would like to taste damper."

"I'm afraid that it will be rather difficult to get, unless you specially order it."

"Oh, no!" said Miss Diggles authoritatively. "I have made a note on the matter. You must be mistaken. Yes, here it is. 'The damper, a form of unleavened bread, somewhat akin to the passover-cake of the Jews, still constitutes largely the staple food of the middle and lower classes.' I have verified that most carefully."

"It would be news—to the Jews," remarked Mary dryly.

She was really enjoying herself. Aunt Sarah didn't always hit on such good specimens as this.

"When do you leave Sydney, Miss Diggles?"

"I shall take the boat for Brisbane to-morrow night. There I shall probably remain a couple of days to study the politics and the resources of the colony, and then go on to Cooktown. Thence I hope to get across to Singapore, *via* the Malay Archipelago. I understand that the Malay is interesting. I purpose writing a special volume on my experience in the Archipelago—'Spice-land and Spindledrift.'"

"What is 'Spindledrift'?"

"Oh, something thrown off, as it were. A sort of literary sea-foam, you know; light, graceful, airy."

"Are we to be 'Spindledrift'?"

"Oh dear, no! My book on Australasia will, I hope, become a standard. I'm putting my very best work in it."

Mary left early, having a call of another kind to make. On being discharged from the hospital Mrs. Clifford had changed her home. After the murder it was not within the limits of human endurance to return to her old home, so she had taken a cheap flat in another part of the city, less crowded, and nearer the open spaces of the suburbs.

Beyond the few words exchanged during the visits to the hospital, Mary had had no opportunity of renewing the friendship—for such it could now be called—between her and the woman whose life she had done much to brighten.

At that time of day Mary hoped to find her alone, an expectation in which she was not disappointed.

"Mum," as Phil still continued to call her, was busy at the machine. There was a full hour of good daylight still remaining before she need put away her work to prepare the evening meal.

Mary, as she ascended the staircase, heard the familiar whir of the sewing-machine. She called it "Mum's

monotone," with which she began the morning and closed the day. To "Mum" herself the machine, once hired but now her own, had become an almost humanised piece of mechanism. She knew every part of it, could tell its wants from the inflection in its voice—a little oil here, a slight adjustment there. To have taken it out of her life would have been to take a part of life itself. All the joys and sorrows of her little history, or far the greater part of them, had been realised as she sat before it, stitching into the material the hours, the days, the years as they sped by. She wept over it, sang over it, dreamed over it—dreams of her boy, her hopes, her faith.

The room was a pleasant one, with an open window, on the sill of which Phil had fixed a box for mignonette that, now in full bloom, scented the place with its fragrance. Everything was exquisitely clean—"Mum's" heritage from her forbears.

"Well, Mum," said Mary cheerily, "this is a change, a delightful change. What a dear little room, and how pretty you have made it!"

This was balm of Gilead to "Mum," who let her eyes wander with chastened pride to the walls with their coloured prints and photographs and occasional Japanese fans and paper butterflies.

"It is quite grand, and you are looking quite well again. And Phil?"

"He is growing stronger every day—and so clever. You should hear the Doctor!"

"Ah, Doctor Dick? He is a good soul is Richard Sheldon—a good soul run to seed."

"He—he is very steady now," said "Mum" gravely. To her Doctor Dick was differentiated from her Maker by a few human failings that perhaps brought him the closer to her on the plane of fallibility. One could not

feel at home with infallibility, but who could fail to feel at home with Doctor Dick?

Perhaps some intonation in her voice set Mary thinking; for after a little casual conversation about Phil and his progress, she asked somewhat abruptly, "Do you ever think of marrying again?"

There was a pause without an answer to the question.

"A woman's heart is never too old for love to enter it by some odd chink," said Mary, with a smile.

"Ah, Mrs. Temple, I know what you mean; but it would never, never do, never—even if there were a chance of it. Haven't you ever felt that you like most doing the things you have not got to do, but if you had to do them—well, you wouldn't like it?"

"Perhaps so; and it may be that therein lies the whole art of managing husbands," replied Mary, with a laugh.

"And there is the past! You can take stains out of most things, but there is no sort of acid that will take them out of lives."

"You are thinking of that miserable story. Why don't you try to forget it? It was long ago."

"Do you remember me telling you of the footstep on the stairs that I feared—that I listened for night after night, when Phil and I were alone?"

"Well! well! It never came—never will come."

"It did come!"

"What do you mean?"

"Mrs. Temple, that man—the man he killed——"

"Yes; Blake, you mean?"

"He was——"

"Your husband?"

"Yes! One night I stood on the landing. He struck a match below, and I saw his face. The footstep came at last, you see."

"How dreadful!"

"I thought it would have killed me. Then the other came, and oh! I cannot tell you of that night!"

"Oh, no! I do not want to hear. I only pity you."

"I told you all about him," she continued, after a pause. "Knowing it, do you think a woman could feel any touch of—of pity for such a man?"

"No, I could not; yet—perhaps—one does not know one's self. Perhaps, God knows—perhaps."

"The night it happened——"

"Yes?"

"I saw the man creep down the stairs. Something fell—a tiny thing; I saw it lying there in the light, glistening."

"Yes?"

"I picked it up mechanically. After leaving the hospital I found it in the pocket of my dress."

"Well?"

"It was then I felt what I said—something like pity for all his wasted, hunted life."

"What was it?"

"I will show you." She went to a drawer. "I thought the man—the murderer—must have torn it away in the struggle and dropped it. See, here it is!" She held in the palm of her hand two halves of a sixpence. "Once, the only bright day I can remember in that awful life with him, he took me a trip to the Mountains. He cut a sixpence in half with his knife. I remember we were sitting on a rock, looking down where the fall leaps over. He was a long time cutting it through, sawing it, and then he gave me one half to keep for luck. I thought he had kept it all these years, and that perhaps, after all—after all, he might have loved me a little—to keep it so long. But when I tried to fit it to my own—see, it does not fit. The head is wrong. Jack——"

"Who?"

"Jack. I told you his name."

"I do not remember."

"His name was John Hawkins—but they generally called him Jack—Yanakee Jack."

"Yanakee! You never said that at the trial. I read every word of it. My husband was the judge."

"They never asked me—and it was my secret. Think of Phil!"

"Yes, I understand. Then this half sixpence?"

"Well, it could not have been his. It must have been the man's, after all. Now I think of it, his watch chain was broken; I had forgotten that. But what is the matter, Mrs. Temple?"

"Nothing, nothing. I'm all right. No, don't bother; just let me rest a—a—little while. I haven't been quite well lately." Her face had become bloodless, and she looked as if about to faint.

"There, I'm better now—better. It's so selfish to be like this. Women are such fools—such fools! No, please don't worry, don't worry! Just let me be a minute." She lay back in the chair, closing her eyes, trying to quiet the rapid beating of her heart—concentrating every effort to stave off the faintness creeping over her. At last she succeeded, and the blood came slowly to her face again.

"I want to take this piece with me," she added. "It might be of use to the man. It was his, I suppose. I will give it to my husband; he will know. The thing was all a mystery—why he did it. It may help him. He was sentenced to death—God pity him! Please take my arm downstairs. I left the carriage waiting, and I want to go home. No, you mustn't come with me. Just tell him 'Home'—home. I want to go home."

CHAPTER XXXI

ON reaching home Mary went at once to her room. It was yet an hour to dinner-time, and Temple had not returned. With feverish hands she tossed off hat and wraps and sought the key of a private drawer. In a little box, filled with the old-fashioned trinkets and the odds and ends that have no use, but carry with them some cherished memory, she found what she sought—the broken half of a sixpence.

There was a momentary hesitation, as if the premonition of disaster stayed her hand.

Then she took it to the light and looked at it steadily. From her purse she drew out that other half. She placed them together. They fitted accurately. There could be no mistake.

She sat down—no longer able to stand. Her hand closed rigidly over the pieces. She felt her face grow cold and clammy; her limbs were inert. Life seemed to stand still in that supreme moment.

How long she sat there staring blankly at the wall she never knew. The dressing-bell rang; the dinner-bell rang. A maid knocked at her door.

“What is it?”

“The dinner is served, ma’am.”

“I am not going down; I am not well, Susan.”

“Would you like a cup of tea, ma’am?”

“Nothing, nothing; only leave me alone.”

“Mr. Temple, ma’am——”

“Yes?”

"He has sent a message to say he is dining at the club."

"Thank God for that!" she murmured. "Very well, you may go."

The daylight departed; the night came. Through the open window the gas-lit streets of the distant city sparkled. Still she sat there, with the pieces of silver clasped in her hand. From time to time she wiped her moist face and tried to think; but her mind went blank—idly blank. She saw the dim reflection on the cheval glass, the glint of light on the pictures on the wall. They came and went, lacing and interlacing. Would she never think again? Slowly there came back to her, like the remembered fragments of a dream, the day they parted the coin between them. Luck! What luck it had brought!

The hall door opened and closed. Temple had returned. She heard his muffled footstep on the staircase. He was coming to her.

"What! all in the dark, dear?"

"Yes, John. I was tired and have been resting."

"Let me light the gas."

"No, please, no. I am better in the dark. Come near me, John."

"How cold your face is, dear!"

"Yes, I am not very well. Sit on the stool, dearest—near me. There!"

He sat down, and she drew his head near to her, and stroked it with the mother-touch that enters so subtly into a woman's love.

"Has it been a tiring day, John?"

"Yes, sweetheart, and more."

"More? What is the more? Is something troubling you? Won't you tell me?"

"It is one of those emotional troubles, Mary, that find their way to the surface of life now and then."

"Yes, dear ; I understand. What is it ?"

"You remember that case—the man I had to sentence last month ?"

"Ye—e—s."

"He will be executed to-morrow morning, and the wretched business has been with me all day."

Not a word. He waited.

"Mary, let me light the gas. There is something the matter with you ?"

"There is, John. Don't light the gas, please. Will you go down to your study, and I will come to you ? I have something to say."

She could not tell him there—there, where they had lived so close a life together. He rose, and was moving to the door.

"John !"

"Yes, Mary ?"

"I want you to kiss me—again."

He returned, and bent over her. She lifted up her head and put her arms about his neck.

"Have I been a good wife to you, John ?"

"None better in the world, chérie !"

"John, I love you with all my heart. Do you believe me ?"

"I believe you from my soul, wife—sweetheart."

She kissed him and nestled her head against him.

"You are in some trouble too, Mary. Tell me about it. Let me help you."

"Yes, I am in trouble, John. Now go, dear."

He went to his study and waited her coming.

Darkness hid the agony of the woman he had left behind him.

The shaded lamp in the study cast its circle of light upon the table and left an outer area in shadow. She had

thought of this when she had said the study. She could not meet him with the glare of light upon her face. She would be merciful thus far to her own shame, and the shame she would put on him.

He rose as she entered, and placed a chair for her with the studied courtesy he had never failed to show her.

How to begin! What to say! To wreck one's life with one's own hands! Could she do it?

"Well, dear, what is the trouble?"

The quiet, evenly-enunciated words, with their undertone of affection, grated on her nerves more than a gust of passion. She would take her courage in both hands, and tell him now quickly and have it over. It must be done at once, or strength would fail her.

"John! You spoke of that man—that most unhappy man. God pity him!—pity him, John!"

"Dearest, do not take it to heart so much! It was weak of me to tell you."

"Do you know who he is? Did you never suspect, John? Did you never see?"

"See what, Mary?"

"He is James Hungerford. You remember 'Jim'?"

"Good heaven! Then it is true!"

"What is true?"

"Vaughan saw what he thought a fancied likeness to him, and—it is true after all!"

"Yes, it is true. John! he was my playmate in our childhood. My mother loved him as a son. Can't you save him? You have influence—you were his judge. Oh, John! can't you try? If there is anything I can give you more, anything out of my life, out of my love, you shall have it—anything, my husband, my beloved!"

She knelt by his side and fondled his hand. "Anything—everything—if you will save him!"

"For the day he saved your life, Mary, I would willingly give my name—our little fortune—all that we hold together—if they could help him. But it is impossible; it was a vile murder, though I say it—cold-blooded, wanton."

"Oh! you do not know that, John; how can you know? Behind it all there may have been something hidden away, something secret. There might have been—there might indeed!"

"Mere surmise, dear—mere surmise."

"No, not mere surmise. I know it—I mean I have learnt it, heard it."

"Know what, Mary?" He looked down at her, pleading so piteously, as she held his hand, and—and the breath of some vague suspicion caught at his heart.

"What do you know?"

"The man he murdered was Yanakee. You remember him? A dreadful man—not fit to live, John; cruel even to the dumb things about him. You remember I told you of the wretched dog that day, all scarred with cuts and grovelling on the track. The devil lashed the piteous, crawling thing!"

"Yes, I remember. Well?"

There was a pause.

"Well?"

Her mouth was dry. She could scarcely articulate. When she spoke it was in a hoarse whisper, and she bowed her head to her hands. She had thought only of herself and the child—leaving him to die—he was to die to-morrow. Jim, her playmate, sweetheart, lover—to die to-morrow—die to save her and the little chap.

"What do you say?"

"He was there——"

"Where?"

"The night we spent in the hut——"

"The night of the flood?"

"Yes."

"In the hut with you? You told me so."

"He was there, John—there——"

"Yes, yes!"

"Not"—her voice was so low he could scarcely hear the words—"not—not—in the but."

"Mary, what do you mean? You let me think he was with you both all that night."

"I—I—oh, merciful Father! let me die, let me die!" she wailed. "John, don't you understand?"

"He was not there?"

"He came at night—late—and he knew."

"Knew what?"

"Knew we were together there—together. Don't you understand—without—without making me say it? I can't say it, John; I can't say it."

"My God!" and he drew a long breath and stood mute as if stunned.

"And the child?" he said at last—"the child is his?"

He heard her moan, the only answer she could give him.

"And this man, he drove your lover, paramour, this adulterer to death—whilst you stood by! My God! my God, woman! you stood by without a word!"

"I never knew. I swear I never knew. He came here one day—when the boy was born. And the boy—I thought only of the boy—his name, his future. He was ruined—it meant so much for my baby. Can't you understand? It was not of my own life I was thinking, but the boy's and yours."

"Mine!" he said bitterly.

"Yes, yours. It was not love, John, but only wild passionate craving for a child. I wanted a child so much.

We had none. It was just madness! All day long I would think of a child in my arms. I wanted one so much. I was a woman, and other women had their little ones, but we had none." As she pleaded she caught him by the sleeve of the coat, trying to draw him near her.

"It was not love, John—not the love that grew between us, between you and me, John."

He laughed at her. "Love is honour, truth. What do you know of truth or honour?"

Still she tried to hold him; but he drew away as if she were unclean—some foul, leprous thing. Then he turned and laughed at her again—all the bitterness of his heart at the tongue's tip.

"Love between us—us! Liar! Adulteress!"

Had he struck her across the face with his hand the pain would have been nothing to it. He heard the agonised wail, the cry, "Oh, John! don't, don't! For the love of God, John, not that—not that!"

He drew from her further and further, but she followed him pace by pace with child-like persistency. At last, she fell at his feet, still crying to be spared—spared the lash of his contempt, the brand he put upon her.

Temple's eyes were sparkling with the light of fury. His clear-cut, olive-tinted face was fixed as in the rigid lines of a mask; concentrated in a passion that found no utterance save in the hissing sibilation of the word "Adulteress!"

Even at his feet she tried to cling to him, but he thrust her back.

"Liar! Adulteress! Betraying even your lover!" Throwing all his manhood, all his years of cultivated self-control to the winds, he lashed and cut with bitter, taunting words at the moaning woman.

The very thought of the love he had borne her added venom to his words.

In his ungovernable rage, that wild, elemental passion that rips through the thin tissue of civilisation as a knife through a silken robe, he forfeited even the atonement that was his due.

In Mary it vivified the spirit of her childhood. Laid in the grave by the hands of wife and mother, it rose from the burial-place and clamoured at her lips.

She rose and faced him with a passion unrestrained as his own.

"The man you have sent to his death is the father of my child. I want to go to him. I will go to him! He has a right to have me by him. I tell you I will go! You cannot stop me! I dare you to stop me! I will not see him die alone! If I have sent him to his death, I will be with him to-night. Let me go! Out of my way! Stand from before that door! Open it! Open it, I say! By God!—" She rang the oath clear from her lips. "Let me go, or I will kill you!"

He stood before the closed door, against its white panels, rigid, motionless.

"Stand aside! Let me pass!"

"Adulteress!"

Trembling with fury, she caught up a jar near to her hand, and dashed it at the pitiless, mocking face. It shattered into pieces by his head against the upper panel of the door. A fragment cut him on the cheek, and a drop of blood trickled slowly down to the collar.

"Adulteress!"

"He is a man, and can die like a man, but you——"

The passion that had lain, as if in final extinction, through the years of maturity, flamed up and beyond control. Her face was so distorted, that every trace of womanly softness

had disappeared. She came close to him, closer, closer, standing proudly erect, yielding him not an inch.

"He is a man—a man I say. It is his—child—but you——"

If she had put a pistol to his heart the bullet could not have reached it more surely than the bitter reproach. It shook him like a leaf. He gasped from the exquisite pain of it—this final insult. He put his hand out for support. And he had loved her !

Then, suddenly as it had come, the wild leap of the consuming fire within her flickered down, out, leaving only the ashes of remorse behind.

He caught her as she fell, the proud figure swaying to and fro, then collapsing like a house of cards.

As he raised the head of the unconscious woman he had once called wife, and placed a rest beneath it, he noticed, with the odd inconsequence that strays into moments of extreme emotion, that the thick rippled hair was here and there streaked with grey. Youth was passed for both of them. Youth, with its enthusiasms, its ideals, its ambitions, its restless passions.

She had come very close to him ; closer than ever he had dreamed a woman could come to him. And this was the end !

He shivered as he rose. He rang the bell, and bade the servant who answered it to take a cab and fetch the doctor. He made no attempt to revive her.

The medical man came without delay, and noting the cut on Temple's face, looked inquiringly at him.

"There has been an accident, Mainwaring."

The doctor asked no questions. He had not been in and out of a thousand homes without learning how good a thing is silence—beyond price in his profession.

"She wants rest. Give her something that will carry her

well over the night. Rest for twenty-four hours—give her that if you can, and you can do her, do us, no better service, Mainwaring.”

She was removed to her room, and the required drug sent for and injected.

“I will send you a nurse to-night. There is nothing more to be done at present. She will sleep through the night, probably far into to-morrow.”

The doctor left. Temple went to his dressing-room. It opened into the room where she lay. He could hear her breathing, as now and again he stopped from the task of packing a valise. At last it was ready. In the meantime a cab he had sent for arrived. He hesitated, but finally went into the dimly-lit room where she lay, turned up the light, and stood by the bedside. He looked around the handsomely-furnished room, its atmosphere faintly impregnated with the odour of perfume. The dainty clothing thrown upon the couch, the delicate colours, the soft texture, the womanly love of pretty things—after all, they were part of home.

Bitterness had gone—but so had love. He could never bring the old warmth back again, nor bring to life the woman dead in his heart.

He turned the light down, and left her untouched.

“Send any letters to the club.”

The door closed ; and with its closing, home went out of Temple's life.

CHAPTER XXXII

"Good morning, Johnson!" said the chaplain blandly. "That was a nice drop of rain we had last night."

"Yessir!" said the warder, touching the peak of his cap. "Not before we wanted it, though." In this country, it does not do to be too grateful to the elements.

"Anything new?"

The warder made an upward inclination of his head. "Man upstairs, sir."

"Ah yes! of course. How forgetful of me. Sent up yesterday, was he not?"

"Yessir."

"It's a long time now since we had any one upstairs," said the chaplain reflectively. "The last, I think, was Roberts."

"Yes, your reverence."

"Dear me! dear me! That was a very difficult case, Johnson!"

"Yes, sir. Never took kindly to it, not up to the last." And Johnson, having an eye on the chaplain's "good word," sighed deeply.

"He was not at all resigned. I never had a more trying experience. Resignation—resignation is everything, Johnson."

He went up the iron staircase thinking of Roberts, and trusting that the new man would be more amenable to resignation—it was a frame of mind that made it much more comfortable for all concerned. He was a good man after a pattern was the chaplain, and never spared himself

in the way of duty ; but he had long since crystallised in his creed. Religion had become to him almost the equivalent of an exact science ; and the teachings of his Church had to him something of the value of mathematical formulæ.

Humanity had to adapt itself to the Church ; not the Church to the needs of humanity. Modern latitudinarianism grieved him. It was a discomfoting word any way you looked at it. "It is as if every one ran about with his own little candle, instead of fixing his eyes on the great light of the Church," he had been heard to say.

The condemned cell, euphemistically referred to in the gaol as "upstairs," was a fairly large, square room, divided in the middle by a series of vertical iron bars, wide enough apart for an arm to pass through. The door from the corridor opened into one part of it, and a wicket gave entrance to the other part in which the prisoner was caged. There, ironed, he slept in his hammock, and was served with meals. A warder was stationed in the other part, and, except when relieved from time to time, remained there from the day the prisoner entered the cell till the final hour when the sheriff made demand for his body.

The chaplain, on entering, was thankful to find "the man upstairs" of different metal to Roberts, deceased. There was clearly hope of resignation here.

Jim listened respectfully to what he had to say. Without assent, without dissent. Not the least of the lessons that his father, from whom he had learned much that was passing good in his life, had taught him was respectful tolerance for the creeds of others. Had the Rev. Mr. Vermont been a Calvinist or a Confucian, a priest of the Yellow Robe or a wanderer from the fold of some Thibetan Llamasterie, he would have given ear to him with courteous inclination—if only the man were in earnest. The chaplain

was in earnest ; a narrow-souled man, but true in the grain, and Jim heard him with grave attention.

Every day he came and went ; and every time he went he sighed, and still he laboured at his spiritual task.

At last, one day he exclaimed : "Blake, you are unfailingly courteous—and unfailingly indifferent. What am I to do? What can I do?"

Said Jim, "There is a man I would like to see—a clergyman. Years ago I knew him ; he will remember if he comes. His name is Fennel—the Rev. Luke Fennel. I believe he is settled in Sydney, somewhere. I think that he would understand—that is, that I would understand him better. He knew my people—and that counts for something, don't you think?"

"Very well," said the chaplain, in a tone that betrayed regret at his own lost efforts. "I know Mr. Fennel—we met once at a diocesan garden-party. You can't see very far into a man's soul at a garden-party," he reflected, "but no doubt he is sound. I'll write to him," he said aloud.

The conscientious chaplain did so without delay, and next day Luke Fennel presented himself at the gaol and was admitted.

"I'm afraid, Fennel," said the chaplain, "you will find it an obdurate case." He shrugged his shoulders. "I can get nothing out of the man. He is simply courteous and indifferent. I'll do him that justice. He is courteous with an old-fashioned formality that is one of the puzzling features about his character. He does not seem to realise how short the time is in which to make his peace. One day he remarked that he remembered reading that Carlyle, in a time of trouble, occupied his mind with the works of Captain Marryat—that Marryat would take him back to boyhood—in fact, he would like to read a book or two, or failing the excellent Marryat, an odd volume of Mayne

Reid would not be amiss. What can one do with a man like that?"

"Much or little!" jerked out the parson.

The chaplain looked grave. "Perhaps you may know what is enigmatic to me. There is some mystery about the man that I cannot fathom, and if I don't mistake, he'll carry it with him to the grave—carry it as he carries the secrets of his soul, I'm afraid."

"I've racked my memory all night," said the parson, "trying to recall the name. Blake, you said, eh?"

"Yes, Blake is the name. Said he knew you years ago."

"Well, good-bye. Perhaps it is one of my little flock from the hills gone far astray, God help him!"

"Whoever he is, he is a splendid man physically. Ah! the pity of it, Fennel—a life like that!" So the chaplain went his way, and the parson entered the cell of "the man upstairs."

Jim was seated, listlessly turning over the leaves of an edifying book left for his perusal by the chaplain. It was of the order of cocksure theology, and insisted upon the necessity of the acceptance of certain points of belief as essential to salvation. He looked up as the parson entered, and rose with a start.

"Fennel, old man!"

Fennel was dumb with amazement. It was some seconds before he exclaimed, "What, you! you, Jim——"

"Yes, Jim Blake," said he hurriedly. "Blake! you remember me. Jim Blake!" and he glanced at the warder.

"Yes! yes! of course, Blake!" said Fennel, with quick apprehension. Then he looked round him, still dazed with the shock of the unexpected meeting.

"You sent for me!" said Fennel at last, feeling the constraint of the warder's presence. It was unbearable. He turned to the man.

"Could you not leave us together for a little while? The prisoner is a friend of mine; he might be a brother for the matter of that—cannot we have a few minutes' conversation alone?"

The warder muttered something about rules and regulations, but as the visitor was a clergyman, and brought there by the chaplain, he thought it safe to risk a little, and so stood outside the door in the corridor.

The parson went close to the bars, and, taking Jim's hand in his, gripped it with an eloquence passing the eloquence of words.

"What does it all mean, Jim?"

Jim held a bar of his cage by each hand, and swayed backward and forward. The exercise, slight as it was, gave him relief from the inertia of his confinement. Fennel, even at that expectant moment, looked at the athletic figure with admiration.

"Fennel," said he, "I have been glancing through that thing," and he indicated the chaplain's book with a side glance. "The beginning and the end of your creed, and I say it with no disrespect as you shall see, seems to be faith, 'believing what you cannot prove.' Faith at its best seems to me to be a simple trust in the wisdom and beneficence of the Almighty. You have that faith, Fennel; and a man who can trust his God in a clean, straightforward way, without quibble and without abasement, can trust his friend, don't you think?"

"I trust my God—I trust my friend!" said the parson tersely.

Jim's face was good to see, as he looked down at the thin, sallow face, with dark, deep-set eyes, on the other side of the bars.

"I knew it. Then you must trust me. I murdered the man—murdered him in cold blood, because I could see no

other way out of a hole. I will die for it, and perhaps, Fennel, old man, it may be better so, though honestly I can't pretend I think so. I hardly know what else to say, parson, old chap, only to ask you again to trust me. It was not for myself I did it—that is, not altogether; and I say it not because I want to crawl out of the guilt of the thing, or smooth it over, but just for the sake of leaving one decent thought behind me. I killed him, and I'd kill him again—if there were no other way. Will you trust me, Fennel, and believe that it was not altogether selfish?"

"I'll trust you!" said the parson, looking straight in the face before him.

"Do you know," said Jim, after an awkward pause, "do you know"—and he gave an odd little laugh, the laugh we give when the good we are ashamed of is knocking at the door of our heart—"do you know that after—after this business, and when I am in the Hereafter, as you call it, when I see my dear old dad there—he may not altogether be ashamed of me. Perhaps he might think that, after all, since I've paid the price—perhaps he might think I am not altogether a—a—prig, you know. I could not have faced him if I had shirked." An odd, queer smile broke out over his face. "The only time he used his horsewhip on me, Fennel, was once when I was a boy; and fairly, old man, it was the other chap's fault; but I told on him, and the old man said that the fault didn't matter a damn. It was the mean spirit of shirking a punishment, and letting upon the other fellow. He was a fine fellow—clean through and through, and"—added Jim contemplatively, as if adding a coping-stone to the moral edifice of his father's memory—"he could swear like a trooper. You won't ask me any questions, Fennel? I've no other confession to make—nothing to say beyond what I've told you. Come to me as often as you can, and we'll

talk of old times. This sort of thing"—and he shrugged his shoulders as he looked round the cell—"isn't as cheerful as a camp with the cattle, and sometimes I get a bit hipped."

Fennel promised, and came every day and stayed the greater part of it.

Generally he found Jim in good spirits, or at least not showing any outward sign of depression. Occasionally, however, there were periods of mental trouble. On one of the daily visits he abruptly said—

"You had a wife, Fennel?"

The parson nodded. On most subjects he was reticent, but on this subject he was absolutely silent.

"And a child?"

Again he nodded.

"Had they lived, Fennel, is there anything you would not have sacrificed for them—even life itself?"

He had only to look at the parson to see his answer in the pain that pinched the thin face thinner.

"Even life!" he repeated, and as he did so, put his hand through the bars and gripped the parson by the shoulder. "Love and a child, old man, carry us far. Even to the gate of death."

The parson obtained permission to bring the prisoner some tobacco of his own special smoking—a most artfully prepared mixture, that smoked cool, was as sweet as a nut, and of an altogether captivating flavour.

They would sit, one on one side of the bars, and the other on the other, smoking this perfect mixture, and telling over the past, and dreaming of the river, the hills and the gullies, of the flush of colour in the spring, and the white capping of the topmost peaks of the ranges in the winter season.

It was rarely they touched upon religious subjects.

Somehow, to the parson, to be near the hills in one's thoughts was quite near enough to God for all parties concerned. Once he did suggest—

"Like me to read any part of the Church Service, Jim?"

"No, thanks."

"Lord's prayer?"

"Well, yes, old man. It's a good prayer, anyhow."

The parson repeated it reverently.

"'Lead us not into temptation,'" said Jim reflectively.

"'Give us this day our daily bread.' The pith and marrow of our lives, eh, Fennel? There spoke the Son of Man!"

"If all the rest were swept away, Jim, there's enough in that prayer—enough for all of us." He sent a cloud of fragrant incense from his pipe. "It goes to the root of things. Just God breathing through humanity—average, fallible humanity."

"Sir Galahad was very young," remarked Jim. "But Christ knew what temptation meant. 'Lead us not into temptation.' That's a good prayer for all but the cocksure righteous, Fennel."

"Sterling good, Jim, sterling good! After all," said the parson, breaking into momentary eloquence, "it's the human-hearted compassion and understanding of the Master that will tell in the long run; not us, the priests or our creeds."

"'Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive them that trespass against us.' Well, that's a fair deal on the face of it, Fennel. But it's a big order, don't you think? Now," said he slowly, with the stem of his pipe between his teeth, "I'll take the handicap, whatever it is, and work it off; but I can't, I simply can't—I'm damned if I can—forgive Yankee!"

"Yankee?" said the parson, with surprise in his voice.

"It slipped out. I did not mean to tell you, Fennel. You will forget it—never mention it? Give me your word."

"I will never mention it!" But it troubled him nevertheless. So Yanakee was the murdered man. What did it mean?

As the day of the execution drew near, Fennel began to lose nerve. The strain told on him; not on the condemned man. It seemed to the parson as if some spirit of eastern fatalism held possession of the man, so little did he note the passage of time bearing him to eternity.

Fennel, lying sleepless at night, his overwrought senses quickened into abnormal sensitiveness, would in fancied metempsychosis live in the body of his friend, and suffer the agony of the approaching end. And whilst he lay staring blankly into the darkness of his room, a prey to his imagination, the man himself lay peacefully asleep. Since the day he stood in the dock watching the twinkling lights of the court go out one by one, the fever had left him. The restlessness, the clinging desperately to far-off hope, had passed away. It seemed as if the faculties that make for mental suffering had been mercifully paralysed. Out of the inevitable came peace. From the Christ on the cross slipped all the burden of human suffering with the words "It is finished." It was finished for Jim, and he was free from care.

The day before the execution Fennel was a pitiful sight—worn out by sleepless nights, listening to the footstep of Death coming nearer and nearer.

They were together all that day, the parson holding himself up by a supreme effort. Jim noted it and felt concern for him. He gave, rather than received, consolation. It was all over for him; but poor Fennel! what a trial he had before him! At night he urged him to go home and rest. But the parson shook his head.

"Let me stay, Jim, let me stay!" And he let him.

The last night they spent together with no intervening bars. The parson sat on the three-legged stool, and Jim stretched himself in his taut hammock. They smoked, and talked once again of the old days—recalling old faces, old scenes.

Jim fell asleep soon after midnight. The execution was fixed for nine in the morning. The parson, worn of face, with weary but sleepless eyes, a dull ache eating at his heart, sat on, with the smoked-out pipe in his listless fingers.

The prison clock struck one, struck two, struck three. In the prime of physical life, the breath came through the parted lips of the sleeping man in long-drawn, restful periods. With his close curly hair, and the face moulded by the placidity of sleep into a peace akin to that of childhood, his mother might have stooped to kiss him—her boy returning to her through the years.

As the dawn approached the air of the cell grew chill, and the parson drew the blanket over the uncovered arms. He noted as he did so how the sun-tanned skin ran out at the upper arm to the whiteness of a woman's. It struck him as odd, the contrast—this delicate whiteness hidden from the world's eye.

"After all," he thought, "it is life. We see only the tan and coarse grain of things, but in us all—even the least of us, thank God!—there is some white, tender spot that His eye will surely see."

Jim slept till after the morning sun, far away in the ranges, had risen from the eastern sea and climbed the upward slope. The river caught its light, and the threaded drops of dew upon the myriad webs spun from tuft to tuft of grass, sparkled as if—and indeed they were—the purest gems. The cattle coming down to drink stood knee-deep

in the water at the sandy spit, bronze-red patches against the green shallows of the stream. Beyond, where a spur of the range ran out, an eagle-hawk circled in the air. The scrub was musical with the notes of birds and sounds of insects. Clean, crisp, morning air!

The parson's thoughts were there, and Jim in his dreams was there. He muttered in his sleep, and the parson caught the words: "Good-bye, Maman. I shall be home to-night. The track is blazed, and the moon will be up;" as though at the break of day he went on a journey.

His arms tossed aside the covering. He stretched himself in the luxuriant ease of young life waking to the day. With half-opened eyes, the mist of sleep still clouding his mind, he smiled in half recognition of the figure at his side.

The mist drifted; and the truth cut at him with a brutal thrust.

He twisted on the pillow with the momentary pain of it; and the parson, gripping the clenched hand, heard the smothered sob. It was the first and last break-down; but when he turned to him again, the parson saw an older face. Perhaps at some moment of that awakening the soul of the child had returned to the mother's that gave it birth.

The parson fell on his knees, and put his arm on the prostrate man. He tried to pray, but could only say, "Jim! Jim!"

"There, old chap, there!" said Jim, rising from the hammock, and taking Fennel by the shoulders. "There's only a little way to go now. Don't break down at the last stick."

The parson stood up and straightened himself; and there was no break-down after that.

"Have you a message for any one, Jim?"

He shook his head.

"Not a word?"

He shook his head again, for he dare not trust his voice. This was his punishment—this, not death. They must never know, and yet he gave all he had to give for them. All! Well, it wasn't much—a poor sort of life—but it was all he had to give. He saw her in the garden. He saw "the little chap" with the box tucked under his arm. The parson forgave him the sharp twist on his heel as he turned his back on him; at the last stick too! Was there to be a baulk now?

"Nothing, Fennel, nothing!" He turned to him as quickly as he turned away. "Once you knew a man named Blake. He murdered. He died for it. That's all."

There was a movement in the corridor. The sheriff had come.

"Good-bye, Fennel." He grasped the parson's hand, and held it in his strong grip for a moment.

The parson, looking in his eyes, saw no fear, but only the dreamy look of the long years ago when he and his horse plodded the bush tracks.

"What is it, Jim?" he said in a whisper.

"I am dreaming of the old home, Luke."

The last time Fennel had heard the word was from his wife's lips.

"At just this hour the Mater and I walked the garden together arm in arm. Good Lord! I can smell the flowers in the dear old place. And there's the whinny of her mare coming to us across the paddock!"

His arms were bound. The parson put his surplice on. It was on—that was all he knew; but he felt a new courage in his veins. There was to be no shirking at the last.

They moved along the corridor, and the parson's voice rose clear and strong.

"I am the Resurrection and the Life, saith the Lord!"

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The nurse had thrown up the bedroom window to let the fresh morning air flow in. She was tired with watching all night at the bedside of the unconscious woman, and it was pleasant to feel the cool morning air on one's face. The sweet scent of the garden flowers came in with it. Not a cloud in the sky; a blessed, peaceful morning!

The woman on the bed lay free from care or dream, her face touched with the peace that seemed to breathe in the morning air.

The nurse, standing at the window, counted the strokes that came in faint pulsations from the distant city.

"It is nine o'clock!"

CHAPTER XXXIII

THE news-boys in the city streets were crying "Full details of the execution!" and clerks and mechanics, going home after the day's work, eagerly purchased the pennyworth of sensation that gave a momentary fillip to their jaded senses.

Temple, sitting in his chambers, heard the repeated cry from the street below, mingling with the noise of traffic.

All day long, with dogged persistence, he had striven to absorb himself in work. It seemed to him to be the one thing left for him. He was intensely weary. He had counted every hour of the night, his excited brain re-enacting the scene he had passed through, every event impressed on it as if seared there by a brand.

Time after time he tried to drive it away, to think of something else—to formulate some plan for the future, but in vain; there would be a break in the sequence of his thoughts, and he would be back again face to face with the woman he had called "wife." The night seemed never-ending; and at daybreak he rose and walked the streets. The shopkeepers began to take down their shutters and sweep out their shops. He envied them their night's rest, and wondered idly what their homes were like; if to the monotony of the day's toil there was a background of peace, and love, and loyalty. Then the city began to wake into life, the streets to fill with incoming, hurrying men and women, from whom and whose life he felt strangely isolated. Was he the one homeless man in all this multitude?

As he entered the Domain gates he met a ragged,

blear-eyed creature with a roll of tattered paper under his arm. He gave a coin to him; after all, there was a community of suffering between them. In the Gardens he rested on a seat, but his mind, at first dull and vacant, returned again to the accursed rut in which it had moved all through the hours of darkness. There was no rest anywhere. He would go back to the club, and bathe and shave; and then go to his chambers and work. There was nothing for it but work to exorcise this devil that had possession of him.

So he set to work with feverish strenuousness, trying to shut out all memory of the night—all thought of the scene that was enacted at the gaol that morning. He refused to see any one, and gave orders that he must be left undisturbed. Luncheon was brought to him in his chambers, but it was left almost untouched. He kept at work with dogged resolution, the resolution of one who clings to the only means of salvation within his reach. When the daylight failed, his lamp was lit, and he worked on heedless of time. At last the fagged brain refused to labour; he put his head down on his folded arms upon the table, and slept.

Mary did not return to consciousness till late in the afternoon. She came out of her long sleep with that sense of physical lassitude that is the complement of a great strain. Dimly her mind recalled the scene of the previous night, its cause, its consequence. She asked the time of the nurse who stood at her bedside—heard it unemotionally, resting in that perfectly tranquillity of mind which realises the inevitable—the something which Time has taken to himself, and put beyond all human control. It was over and done with—taken out of her hands.

As the evening approached she asked after Temple—had he returned? She waited with inert patience, hoping,

trusting she knew not what. Had he returned? "No." Still she waited, nursing the vague hope.

At eight o'clock the nurse was called from the room. She returned.

"Has he come?" Again, "No!"

And yet again she said, "Perhaps he will come later," and still refused to put aside her poor, wan hope.

"Master Wilf wishes to see you," said the nurse. The boy's entreaties had overcome her professional scruples, and she laid his petition before the mother.

It seemed curious to her at the moment that the boy should have been so excluded from her mind by the one absorbing thought of the man she had so desperately wounded.

"Let him come in, nurse."

He came into the dimly-lit room on tiptoe, as one who enters where the mystery of life and death may be working out its solution.

She drew him near to her at the side of the bed and fondled the curly head. "Oh! mother, it has been so dreadful all day without you!"

"Did you want mother, dear?"

He answered by putting his arms round her neck and nestling close to her.

"And father is not home—yet!"

"He will come by-and-by, dear. He is detained—but he will come home soon."

"May I say my prayers here?"

"Yes, Wilf." She drew to the edge of the bed that he might rest his head on her bosom as he said the simple prayer she had taught him.

He smoothed back her hair with his little hand and kissed her face repeatedly; and with childish earnestness made her promise really that she would soon get well

again, and come downstairs. He gave her a final kiss and was leaving, but returned with a quick impulse.

"There's just one more!" he said. "That's for father, 'cos I may be asleep when he comes home. You won't forget to give it to him, will you?"

"No."

The evening wore on. Ten o'clock came and passed, and still John did not return. She took a sudden resolution to seek him out. She would not let him go like this. He must hear her. The passionately cruel words of last night must not be the last he would hear from her lips. She loved him. There was no hesitancy in the thought. With the years of their life it had blossomed, matured. In all else but this sin of passion, she had been true to him in deed and thought. Surely God would not let it count for naught!

"I am going out, nurse."

The nurse smiled at her, as if the words fell from the lips of a wilful child.

"There, there! I will put the light out; close your eyes, and go to sleep."

Mary slipped from her bed, swaying momentarily with dizzy head. Then she recovered herself, and said, "Bring me my clothes, nurse. Help me to dress."

The nurse, still incredulous, put her hand on her arm.

"Get into bed, Mrs. Temple. This is very foolish. The doctor has forbidden you to leave the room. Excitement is just what you must avoid. Your face is flushed and your eyes bright. If you are not careful, you may be ill very ill for weeks. In a day or two, if you rest now, you may be able to go out. There! Be wise! Go back to bed!"

"I am going out, nurse," she replied in a quiet, determined tone. "Help me to dress. It is useless—you cannot stop me. Tell them to send for a cab."

The nurse continued to remonstrate and persuade ; but Mary was dressing, and gave no heed to her.

At last she was convinced that her control was gone. Reasoning and persuasion were alike lost on the unresponsive, determined woman. She even doubted if the words were heard, so intent was her patient on the task before her. So she helped her to dress, and sent the order for the cab. When it was driven to the door, Mary stood ready. Leaving a message that she would return in an hour, probably less, she stepped into the cab and gave instructions to drive to her husband's club.

At the club she inquired for Temple ; and after a short delay was told that he had not been there since the morning.

She told the cabman to drive to his chambers. There she alighted, was admitted by the caretaker, and made her way up the dimly-lit flight of stairs, along the passage-way that led to her husband's room. He was there. She saw the thin line of light beneath the closed door. Would it be locked ? She stood by it for a moment. There was not a sound, not the rustle of a paper. A vague fear caught at her heart. If——

She put her hand on the door-knob. The door was not locked. She opened it and saw the sleeping figure bowed over the table. With fear bracing every muscle into tension, she walked on tiptoe to his side. Then she heard him breathing. Thank God ! it was only sleep—not that other nameless thing !

She knelt down by him so that her lips were near his ear.

“ John ! John, dear, it is I, John ! ”

He stirred, and moaned in his dream-tormented sleep.

“ John ! Oh ! come home, come home to us ! John, dear ! John ! ”

He moved and raised his head. How wan and haggard

the face looked in the yellow light! As his arms were carried back, one touched her face, and, feeling the contact, he turned and saw her.

For a moment he gazed vacantly into her face, unable to realise that it was really she, and not the face of his dreams.

"John!" came the pleading voice. "John, dear, come home to us!"

Then he lay back in his chair motionless, looking up at the space above the circle of light, trying slowly, wearily, to realise it all.

"Come home to us!" wailed the voice.

"Home?" he repeated mechanically. "Home?" and he looked down again at the crouching figure at his side. "Home?"

"The boy," she said, taking the listless hand on the arm of the chair, "the boy sent you this;" and she put her lips humbly to the hand she held, and kissed it.

"Oh, John! we want you home, so much, dear, so much! We cannot live without you. Come back to us. Even—John, dear, hear me just this once—even God sometimes forgives."

He heard her passively, unmoved, untouched. It was as if something were happening far away, something in which he had no part. It was nothing to him, nothing. There was only one thing for him in all the world—work!

The lamp had been burning low. He bent over and turned up the wick; then looked down on the table, and moved his hands among the papers.

"I have work to do. Good-bye!"

She was so remote from him, so unreal, so outside the limits of his life, that he forgot even the courtesy due to her as a woman. He did not rise from his chair, but took a pen in his fingers, and knit his brow with the effort to

take up the work before him. He commenced to write; and still she pleaded, humbling all her pride in the dust, praying forgiveness, pleading the loyal love of her life save for this one sin. She heard the pen scratching on the paper as she sobbed out her prayer for mercy. At last she rose, but still lingered, watching his face with the solicitude of a child, for some gleam of softening, some sign of forgiveness. It did not come.

"I am going, John."

"Good-bye!"

"John! Is this for ever? Not for ever! Say it is not for ever, and we will wait, wait—the boy and I—wait till you come to us. Let us wait, dear—don't let it be for ever!"

Scratch—scratch—went the pen in the silent room.

"Good-bye!"

She opened the door, and closed it slowly—so slowly—hoping to the last for the word of recall that never came. Down the dismal passage and the long stairs she went in a dream, listening even then for the sound of an opening door—a word from him.

As she drove home, huddled in the corner of the hansom, the streets were crowded with folk from the theatres, laughing, happy, loving—yes, loving; she could see it in the young faces that looked at each other in trust and faith—but for her and the boy love was dead.

The nurse was waiting her return. All the colour had left her patient's face; the eager excitement her eyes. She looked an old woman; the lines of the face showed age.

"You are very tired," said the nurse sympathetically, wondering, with feminine curiosity, what it all meant. She knew enough of human nature, however, to recog-

nise in this patient a type of woman who would not gratify her curiosity, and in her heart she resented it. Why shouldn't she know? Still she was a conscientious woman in the performance of her duties. Mary was speedily in bed again, and the nurse carefully measured out the sedative she had been directed to administer. Before taking it Mary named a servant, and directed that she should be told to pack the trunks for herself and the boy.

"But you must not leave your room for quite a week; after to-night's affair it may be a fortnight," said the nurse, incredulously.

"I am going home, nurse."

"Home?" repeated the nurse. She did not understand.

"My father's station. Up country. I will go by to-morrow night's mail."

"Impossible!"

"Well, the night after. Let them have everything packed."

On the following day, when the doctor called, she told him of her intention.

"To-day is out of the question," he said curtly. He was annoyed at her and the nurse, despite the latter's protestations, for the folly of the previous night.

"Then to-morrow," she said.

He shrugged his shoulders. "It is useless for me to advise. If you go, it is absolutely against my orders."

"I must go home!" she said doggedly. "It is the only thing for me. I shall have rest there—the rest I want. I must have rest, and I can get it there, and there only."

She had a telegram sent. The railway now went by a branch line as far as Fassifern, and a rough road had been graded up to the ridge along which ran the track to Woollawillie.

She would leave Sydney late in the afternoon and reach home about the mid-day following.

She tried to give herself complete rest to meet the journey. But if there was rest for the body, there was none for the mind. If there was hope the night before, there was to-day only despair. She lay for hours trying to devise some means of reaching the heart of the husband who was lost to her. She thought of one last appeal by letter to him. But the formality of writing chilled her. If he would not hear her when all her love for him pleaded in her voice, kneeling there at his feet, then what was the good of writing? No, she would not write—and yet, how could they leave the home he had made for them—a home where they had spent so many tranquil days, husband and wife? She could not leave him without one word. So, in the end she wrote. "We are going to the old home, John—to wait, and, if we dare, to hope. You do not want us now. It isn't the burden. You'd never think of that, I know—only you do not want us. If you would only punish me, John, in whatever way you think, I'll bear it all, and, God knows, willingly, if only you give one word, one little word of hope—hope a year hence, two years hence, but some time. I only ask for some time, John."

They made the journey successfully; the boy all eagerness, she facing it with the force of will that carried her through, and would carry her through, whatever end should come to the despair that filled her heart.

Vaughan met them with the buggy; and, with the tact that is the visible sign of a generous nature, carried matters off as if there had been no whisper of some unknown trouble as the cause for this hurried and unexpected visit to the old home.

If anything, the greeting from the old folk was more

cordial than its wont. But the daughter the old mother held in her arms was a changed woman; and if it had not shown itself writ large in the dejected, tired face, the listless movements, the mechanical speech, it would still have been there to the eye of the woman on whose breast she had lain a helpless babe. Blood speaks to blood in a language of its own.

CHAPTER XXXIV

"SURE, is it yourself, Miss Mary, or your ghost?" said Bridget, letting down the slip-rail for Mary to enter the paddock, where the father's couple of milkers and an ancient crock were kept.

"My word, his reverence will be glad to see you! It's disturbed the man's been the weeks you've been lying sick in the old home. It's Maginnis beyant there," indicating the crock with a twist of her head, "will be glad to hear ye are up an' about again. Musha! but the father's nearly ridden his tail off getting news of ye."

"The dear old man! They told me how often he had called."

"Ah! Miss Mary—sure I beg your pardon, Mrs. Temple, but the old name comes aisy to the tongue—ah! but it's the soft place he has in his heart for ye! Now come along, alannah, and let me make a sup of tea for ye, and rest on the verandah till the priest comes home. Bad cess to it! but to-day of all days ould Sheehan in the flat should take to dying, and send for the priest. Absolution indeed! It's mighty little absolution he'd get from me. It's little he thought of his duties when he was strong and well; and now he's down on his back, it's nothing would do him but have the priest out of bed at two o'clock in the morning; and the poor man snoring as peacefully as a sucking babe. An' they sent the buggy for him. Begor! Maginnis was too aisy for them. That ould Sheehan was so troubled—an' well might he be—at the state of his soul, run wild wid sins like a pumpkin

patch. But he'll be back before you'll think of leaving. Sure, he'd be mad entirely if he missed seeing you, ghost or no ghost!"

So, chattering volubly, she led Mary to the house, having hung the bridle of the horse on the fence, under the shade of a young gum.

The priest's house was of the old school of bush architecture, and on the broad earthenware floor of its verandah, enclosed by creepers, Bridget placed a chair for her, and then busied herself about the preparation of tea.

For over an hour the old woman bustled about her guest, giving her all the news and gossip of the folk whom she had known in the days of her childhood. As the afternoon wore on she had to absent herself to bring up the milkers to the cow-shed, milk them, bake scones for the evening meal, and perform other necessary household duties.

This was Mary's first ride of any distance since she had risen from her bed—after three weeks of fever that threatened her reason. Her mother's unremitting care, the bracing air of the ranges, and, it might be, the absence of physicians, combined to pull her round to health—health restored, but not in its old fulness or vigour. She rose from the bed a changed woman; the wine of life no longer sparkled in its cup; the draught put to her lips was flat and stale. More than a month had passed since the night she left Sydney.

Not a word had come from him—not one word—either of reproach or forgiveness. Had he desired to kill her by inches, he could have devised no surer means. Physical life, begotten in the bush, strenuous, tenacious, still persisted; but all the tonic of the bush failed to minister to a mind diseased. She sometimes thought that if she

could only break the inward silence there might be a cure for her. As she lay in her bed, drifting listlessly back to convalescence, she realised the human appeal of the confessional. To unburden her soul of its secret, to make her peace, to find a consolation in the repetition of the *mea culpa*—she thought of it as a possible remedy, or at least alleviation. But at the front of all these introspective fancies stood a sentinel that guarded her lips—her husband's shame, put on him by her sin of betrayal. Though it killed her, yet she would keep the silence unbroken. Her mother's wistful eyes, the hurt she wrought her by the thing withheld, the pain of motherhood realising the child's trust departed, added to the mental burden new bitterness.

As soon as she was able to do so, she had her horse "Sam" saddled, and she, with the boy on his pony, spent long hours in the bush and scrub. Wilf rioted in the company of Sheila's sturdy, bush-bred youngsters; but his mother's companionship was a mark of affectionate distinction that touched his youthful pride.

A passing happiness came to her in the moments of forgetfulness of the present, when she pointed out to him the places endeared to her by childish fancies. She longed to imbue her son with the spirit of the bush and scrub, that it might speak in its own wonderful poetry to him, as it had done to his mother. It had been a fairy-land to her. She showed him the dark pool of the lagoon where the traditionary bunyip dwelt—an eerie creature that rose from the slimy depths—calf-headed, with trailing hair, and great glazed eyes; she-oaks, straight and black stemmed, with thin, sparse foliage, whispering mysteriously in the night breeze, margined the pool. She showed him a famous place for wild duck—a swamp fringed with rushes and rank growth, from which the duck rose in successive flight. Or, perhaps, it was a passing streamer of wild swans far up in

the evening sky, with necks outstretched, their faint, intermittent cry adding to the sense of distance.

They went for long days together through the scrub, she teaching him all the bush lore of her early days, trusting that the little she knew of the great Mother would set root in the boy's heart.

In her own life the love of Nature had become a religious factor. In moments of weariness and depression, when the city life of her married days pressed hard on her, she drew upon the mental pictures of the past life, spent for the greater part in the open air. She sometimes wondered how it was that these impressions were so perfect and enduring; the memory of all else in time became clouded; but the flat, green leaf of a young gum would bring with it, as she crushed it in her hand and inhaled its aromatic scent, a perfect picture of some favourite haunt, so clear, so true in all detail, that for the moment she was lifted from her surroundings and translated in spirit to the very place. She had known the perfect restfulness drawn out of the great vault above in cloudless Australian nights, with the heavens "thick inlaid with patines of bright gold." There was no refreshment like it for the mind, these draughts from the mother breast of Nature. She had little else to give him, not even a name, yet she knew that if she could give him this there was wealth in it not to be had in the bourse or the market-place. If he had it, she thought, he could never wander far. He would be drawn back to the warmth and the sunlight, the prodigal richness of the coast, the mystery and fascination of primeval things in the bush, forgetting the land of drought, remembering only the quick upspringing of green life, that comes after the rainfall like the rapid transformation of a picture on the stage.

She was almost in despair of Father Dermot's return

when the buggy, climbing the red track that led from the coastal lands, came in view. In a few minutes Dermot was shaking her warmly by the hand.

"God save all here!" she said, recalling the old salutation the father had introduced at the homestead, "just," as he said, "to give a flavour to things."

"God save ye kindly!" returned the priest. "Ah! you're the same Miss Mary as ever, though with a difference. Dear me, dear me, *Eheu! fugaces, Posthume, Posthume, labuntur anni*. The flying years, begad! they do more mischief than the flying foxes. They eat up the choicest fruit in the orchard, ma'am," and he bowed to her with a twinkle in his eye. "Now, if they'd be content to nibble at old crab-apples like myself, sure none would complain, but a peach——"

"With the bloom off, father!"

"Well, sorry I am to say it; but my dear lady—well, there now, it's not gone for ever—we'll have you as strong and happy yet as ever you were." But he looked at the changed, lack-life face with affectionate solicitude.

They had tea together, with scones and soda-bread, honey that had the taste of eucalyptus in it, cream freshly skimmed from the dairy pans, and jelly with a delicious sub-acid, made by the frugal Bridget from the native currant.

After the meal, the father got out his pipe, which Mary insisted on filling from the tobacco-jar she had brought him many years before from across the seas.

They sat out on the verandah at the open space by the doorway, where they could see the stars dimly twinkling in the sky through the grey gauze curtain that night was dropping on the land.

Father Dermot had been much exercised in mind over Mary's illness and the absence of her husband. The unex-

pected visit of mother and child to the old home, and now the signs of mental trouble visible in the greatly altered face of the woman, whom as a child he had held so closely in the warmth of his heart, troubled the old priest. If he could help her! In his time he had helped many a troubled soul out of the slough of despond, and set the feet once more on the pilgrim path; and after all, human nature in the essentials of things was the same everywhere, when its outer trappings had been stripped away.

"What troubles ye, my child?"

The words broke abruptly on her ear. There had been a rather long silence, and she was thinking how far back the whirring chorus of insect life at sundown in the bush went in her life.

"Troubles, father? Oh! we all have our troubles—as the sparks fly upward, you know!"

"Could an old priest—an old friend—help you in any way?"

She felt a longing to tell him all. She was a woman, and sympathy, confidence, help, mean so much to a woman. But she only shook her head and said in a low voice, "No, no."

"You forgive me?" he said.

"I do not need to forgive. I understand. There is no soul in all the world, saving mother, I would sooner come to in my trouble than you, my dear old friend."

"I meant it, alannah, as a friend, not as a priest. Friendship is common ground to us all and is a religion in itself. If there is anything I can do to serve you, to help you, tell me truly. A service done to a friend is a chicken come home to roost. They're not all black chickens that come home, my dear, and a few white ones may not go amiss when we send in our final inventory."

"I wish I could add to the number of your white chickens, father—but I cannot! If I could do so, I would; for indeed this—this—the thing is killing me!"

"And I can do nothing for you?"

"Absolutely nothing—only this. Yes, to ride home with me part of the way, and talk to me as you did when I was a child."

He did so, and talked in the old familiar way he had many a time talked to her, about the beauty and wonder of the things about them, and the infinite love of the Maker. He was a rare old optimist in matters of the soul, a spiritual enthusiast who found good in everything.

Mary thought of the wisdom that is out of the mouths of babes and sucklings as she listened to the simple-hearted old man, discoursing at large upon the universal goodness. It could not convince her of the soul of good in things evil, but it had a wonderfully tranquillising effect on her mind; and when they parted she went on her homeward way not without some dim, half-confessed trust that after all the Over-Father would bring good even out of her great trouble. Perhaps, perhaps she might have a letter from John to-morrow; it might be a premonition, an anticipation of a great happiness. Being a woman, primitive superstitions lingered with her. Things do happen strangely sometimes, and after all, she thought, we know so little, so very little of the Dweller in that great outer space that holds the world within it.

They noticed a more animated look in her face when she reached home, a more hopeful note in her voice. "Perhaps to-morrow," she said to herself continually, "perhaps to-morrow!"

As to Father Dermot, when he returned he sat on the verandah so long that Bridget insisted on putting a shawl across his shoulders, and muttered remarks to herself that

reflected not too favourably on the wisdom of old men who ought to know better, sitting up till the small hours.

As a consequence, the priest was late to breakfast the following morning, and had to bear a running commentary by Bridget on the consequences of delaying that meal ; the over-boiling of eggs, the excessive dryness of dry toast, and the nerve-destroying properties of over-drawn tea, and the like.

"Hold your whist, woman! Sure my mind has been engaged by great affairs."

"Great affairs, indeed!" sniffed Bridget contemptuously. "I wouldn't give the shake of a lamb's tail for your great affair that hadn't a good breakfast to set out on. An' what's the great affair, to be sure?"

"I'm going up to Sydney—on a visit."

"To Sydney?"

"Yes, to Sydney, my good woman."

"And what for do ye want to go to Sydney? Have they found ye out at last—you that ought to have been a dean at least? Begad! I wouldn't stop at a bishop. Faix! it may have been so with the Jews, but nowadays the man who sits at the bottom of the table gets no invitation to go up higher—unless he invites himself. Did ye ever notice how one calf will nuzzle the other out, and get all the milk, whilst the old cow chews the cud in the height of indifference? Ah, your reverence! it's you are the calf that waits for the cow to look after you, instead of nuzzling the others out of the way, and having the sup yourself. Maybe it's preferment they want to give you, or maybe it's yer aisy way with the Protestants they've heard of—it's too aisy indeed ye are, liking and loving, and sorra a conversion to your name."

"Hold your whist, woman, and pack my clothes; and send the boy to Driscoll's for the loan of his buggy to-morrow."

Bridget retired reluctantly, her curiosity afire for a solution to this wonder of wonders.

"Will ye want a white shirt?" she inquired at the door. "Maybe a flannel shirt and a dickey wouldn't be grand enough for ye."

"Of course, all of them."

"The whole three! Save me soul! Bedad, is it the Pope at Rome you're going to see? It's oceans of money ye'll be wanting for your washing in Sydney, I'm thinking."

"Leave me in peace," said Dermot wearily; "put all the best duds in."

"Barrin' the shirts, it's not much inconvenience the best duds will be to ye!" said Bridget, as a parting shot.

CHAPTER XXXV

THE Doctor's professional duties were for the day at an end. His wig, grimed with the dust of years to a pensive grey, and his rusty stuff gown were thrown carelessly aside. He took his ease, with his feet on the table, resting the back of his chair against the sparsely-filled shelf where an ancient edition of Archbold's "Criminal Law," a well-worn copy of Russell on "Crimes and Misdemeanours," a dog-eared Stephen's Digest, and sundry volumes of Reports—none complete—picked up at the auctions of the unfortunate, made up his legal library.

There was a fringe of grey hair round the shiny, bald pate, and his bands, of something less than virginal whiteness, were twisted round towards his right ear. A black cutty pipe, the cherished companion of years, juicy enough to have killed any epicurean smoker, was between his lips, and he drew from it a cloud strong and pungent; so pungent that Phil, sitting opposite to him, when he got a whiff of it, winked and coughed, used as he was to Doctor Dick's tobacco.

"It's got a trifle of latakia in it, my boy. An old friend gave me a tin of it the other day, more power to his elbow! But what's the matter, Phil? No trouble, I hope? Sure, its elegantly you're getting on. That was a mighty report ye gave the other day on the Horse Show—the way you dodged the points of the beasts, and discoursed sweetly on your penny trumpet about the animated scene and the national duty of keeping up the breed of horses, was worthy

of my tuition. Ah! begad, it's the great journalist I'll make of ye, entirely! Do you remember how we used to do the Revivals and the Missionary Meetings? Troth, it's funny doings we've been at to get as far as we have, and here ye are now, a full-blown junior reporter, with the sub's scissors in your pants' pocket, an' the editorial 'we' next your heart to keep it warm and hopeful. Begad, sir! there's a trifle of humour in it when ye happen to be acquainted with 'we' in private life. Poor soul! it's often the butcher's bill and a growing family are of more concern to 'we' than the armaments of Russia or the financial crisis. May the devil pursue me, but I never knew this country without a financial crisis? But what's the trouble, Phil?"

Phil explained. He was travelling the path of the newspaper man—a hard one, with never-ending toil, ill-paid, and with little hope beyond it. With his deficient physical powers, the endurance called for, the irregular life, the never-ending fear of "dropping in" over some subject of which he had the scantiest knowledge, was telling on him. His mother's eye noted it; but the Doctor saw nothing but a roseate future for the lad. When Phil washipped or in a corner, he invariably looked up the Doctor for a tonic dose of inspiration. The road to success was always spread out before the Doctor's eyes; it went by his door, and he had contemplated it for many a day, the younger life passing him by whilst he sat at the wayside. And to take this dusty, busy road, he urged the feeble steps of the lad.

The trouble, Phil explained, was this. In the exigencies of the day's work he had been "marked in the book" for a classical concert. The man who did the music and drama had a first night at the "Royal," and so the general staff had to be put on to the minor engagements.

"And you know, Uncle Dick," said Phil desperately, "I don't know B flat from a quaver."

"May ye never know a quaver, my boy, in the noble profession you've adopted. A newspaper man acquainted with quavers is doomed to failure. Strike a high note, my boy. That's what you've got to do. The public like high notes. They've got a notion that true genius is getting a note ahead of the other chaps. Bedad! and I'll teach ye in a jiffy the whole art of writing a musical criticism.

"Don't know a note of music, do ye say? Well, so much the better. What does a judge know of business? Why, man alive, he couldn't strike a balance to save his life, an' yet that's his business, striking balances between plaintiff and defendant, and throwing in a trifle of costs by way of make-weight. It's the impartial mind ye want, and how can it be impartial if you are expert in the business? No, boy, ye must decide by the evidence, an' to do that, the less you know about the business the better. Sure, isn't it the crowning glory of our judges that they know nothing about anything, and decide by the evidence, or as much of it as they can grasp in the day's work? Now, what an enterprising newspaper wants is a man who can turn his pen to anything that comes along—say from an infallible wash for calves' eyes in the 'Advice to Farmers' column, to the amazing merits of a pre-Raphaelite picture in the 'Saturday Art Notes,' or chaos in three movements by the immortal Wagner. Now here are some 'pointers' for ye. If ye get hold of a musical composition, something of importance, a trifle dreary, and as long as ye can bear it, it's pretty safe to call it 'a soul drama.' Just look up the benefactor Grove, his dictionary, by way of a start, and then set out to sea in the cockle boat of your imagination."

Phil looked puzzled.

"I'll give ye an example by way of making it clearer,

laddie." He smoked in silence for a few seconds, concentrating his attention on the fly-speckled ceiling. "Let us take a theme. It might be a storm in the Alps with a pastoral introduction, a horn with echoes, thunder, and a hymn. It seems to be a way with the Swiss to go to chapel when the rain falls. Or take a trifle like this. Bill Joachim—we'll call him Joachim to spiritualise the Bill—well, Joachim is a family man, and he sets out to buy two pounds of loin chops, and when he gets them he finds the price up by reason of a drought. In this humble incident ye have all the elements of a local domestic drama. Now see how the genius of music will lift it out of the commonplace, my boy! We'll take Joachim's drama in four movements.

"After ye'd picked out some morsels from the dear Grove, ye'd waded in something like this, do ye mind. 'The first movement opens abruptly with three sharply-struck quavers'—descriptive of Bill demanding meat at the hands of the butcher. Then ye'd go on. 'With exquisite suggestiveness this rythmical figure is repeated in an increasing tempo.' 'Tempo' just means time, but ye call it 'tempo' all the same. That shows that Bill is in a hurry. 'It is repeated a third time, but now with a prolonged minim a third below.' Ye can fix this up with Grove. The prolonged minim refers to Bill's language. Second movement, Phil. The butcher, stimulated by Bill's prolonged minim, hurries up. 'The andante seems to breathe consolation and hope'—to Bill, by reason of the extremity of his family hungering for meat, do ye mind. Here ye might plunge again. 'How can we interpret the emotional message of its strains!' May the devil pursue me, but that's fine—it gets ye into the altitudes. There is the true poetic vagueness about it. Then Joachim, to the tremolo accompaniment of the violins and violas, asks for

two pounds of loin chops. 'A delightful melody on the clarionets and bassoons now ensues, with a charming staccato passage'—descriptive of the butcher chopping off the meat. Ye might follow that by a plaintive pastorale on the flutes. Begad! the only pastoral music of this country is the concertina, but that's by the way. The pastorale is reminiscent of the remote youth of the wether.

"Then ye come to the third movement; and this is the crisis of the soul drama. The butcher, having wrapped the chops in a newspaper, maybe containing your last 'critique', says 'Tenpence!' 'At this point we see portrayed with the genius of the master mind the overwhelming agony of a great soul in despair.' Bill can't pay, as the 'missus' only gave him sixpence.

"Fourth movement. 'Rapture unconfined, expressed with extreme delicacy on the second violoncellos.' Bill rakes up some small change in his waistcoat pocket, concealed there for surreptitious beer. From this point onward, Joachim being now in legal possession and full ownership of the chops, joy and exultation prevail. There's the devil and all of a noise! 'The brasses catch up the glorious theme, the drum, beginning softly, leads up to a crescendo that unites in one magnificent pæan the full resources of the orchestra. The soul, lifted from this petty clay, soars on the song of victory and exultation upward and upward, seeming with the triumphant pulsations of the stupendous chorus to mount high Heaven in a chariot of fire.' There ye are! Bill goes home to dinner with the 'missus' and the kids.

"There, my boy, there's art for ye by the bucketful, and ye don't know a crotchet from a quaver, and neither in nine cases out of ten do your readers. It satisfies everybody except perhaps the sub-editor with a sheaf of late 'ads' to find room for, and it sounds begad! as it is—brass and a tinkling cymbal."

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Phil was wrapped in admiration and lost in despair, a conflict of emotions that was only brought to an end by a rap at the door.

The Doctor put down his legs quickly, stowed the pipe into a drawer, and bade Phil put up the window to let out the stifling smoke. Then he opened the door.

It was Dermot.

"What in the name of all that's wonderful brings you to Sydney?" was the Doctor's greeting.

"Betune you and me and the post, Dick, that's what's puzzling my brain. I've a notion in my old head to do something, and sorra a bit can I see my way to do it. So I'll sleep on it to-night. Did ye ever notice the way things sort themselves out in your sleep? What's impossible at night is the easiest thing possible in the morning."

"Well, it's your business, Dermot, not mine. Whatever it is, you're as welcome as the sunlight—or what's truer, the drop of rain."

"And how are you, Dick? I'm tired of looking at the papers to see if they've made you a judge."

"Maybe," said the Doctor with a grin, "they're thinking of the loss of income it would be to me. All judges, me boy, sacrifice large professional incomes for the good of their country. It's an axiom in the profession—'let the guineas give way to the scarlet robe!' I'm unaware that you are a bishop yet, Dermot."

"So am I, Dick."

"It isn't anything in that way that's brought you up to town?"

"No, indeed; I've taken French leave for a couple of days."

"Well, it isn't the family estate, for that settled itself—long ago."

"Phil, me boy," said the father, as he stood before him

looking him up and down, "it's a new man you are entirely ! It's thankful to the bush you should be. Man alive ! to think of it—from the bush to Grub Street ! Well, well, there's no accounting for taste."

"There's no nobler profession than that of letters," put in the Doctor expansively.

"When they're letters of credit," dryly commented his brother.

"Well, both letters and credit come easy to an Irishman. Now, Phil, me boy, be off ! It's a word I want with his reverence ; but see if there's any post before you go."

Phil speedily returned with a couple of letters ; and then, bidding the father good-bye, departed.

The Doctor held one of the letters between his eye and the light of the window, then put it down, unopened.

"A bill, Dermot ! May the Lord be merciful to all tailors. It's the longsuffering race they are. There's some tobacco over there ; fill your pipe and make yourself at home, man. Now, what's all this about ?" He opened the remaining letter and exclaimed, "Sheila !"

"Sheila ?" repeated the priest. "Nothing the matter I hope, Dick ?"

"Hum ! hum !"—and he ran his eye rapidly down the page. "May the devil—hum, hum," and as his glance followed the old-fashioned angular writing—for Sheila had not acquired the later mode of caligraphy—his face twisted into a comical grin. "It's the wonderful they are !" he commented.

"Who ?"

"The women, of course. She's on to the sacred trust again. Maybe that's a theological kind, for it's not known to the law !"

"What are ye maundering about, man ?"

"Did ye never hear of—never hear of Susannah and the

sacred trust? Bût maybe it's another Susannah ye know all about, an elegant story indeed with a deal of diversion in it, though it's little humour one finds in the Jews—juniors or elders. It isn't that Susannah at all, man, but the virgin of the jam-pot, as ye might say."

"And why couldn't you say so at once? Well, well, man; get to the point."

"It's a poor pleader you'd make, Dermot, to come to the point so soon. But the long and the short of it is, the little woman is going to have a village as she calls it."

"Deed, and how many go to a village?" said Dermot simply, astonishment writ large on his round face.

"Ho! ho!" laughed the Doctor, half choking himself with the smoke from his pipe. "Tare an' 'ounds, man, ye'll kill me. A village—ho! ho! Faix, it's a large order ye want, avick!"

"Cease your prate, man. What do ye mean at all?"

"Well," explained the Doctor, wiping his eyes, "it's a notion the little woman has to build a village for the 'childre'—it's the tender soul she has, God bless her!"

"Amen!"

"To gather in the bits of things with rickets and rheumatism, chills and colic, and a multitude of 'blessings in disguise'—I think that's what ye call them, Dermot, eh?—that afflict the wee creatures, and brighten up things for them with drums and Punch and Judy, sponge-cake and jujubes, or what you like, and plenty of it. I wonder, Dermot, if the fine music of your heaven would be complete without the laugh of a child? But there, there! ye'll beguile me into theology, maybe, and the ways of the law are as arrows for straightness by the side of the creeds. But it's tired ye are, so be off with you, and look me up before ye go back."

Left to himself, the Doctor continued the perusal of his

letter, and as he did so his face grew graver and graver, till he let the rustling leaves of foreign note fall on his table. He put his head on his hands to think. Aye, to think—and more.

It must have been a long reverie, for the room was dark when Phil entered it. Dr. Dick raised his head, and when he spoke Phil wondered if he were suddenly stricken with an illness.

“Phil, avick!”

“Yes!”

“They want you——”

“Who want me?”

“Vaughan and the wife. They want you as secretary to the home—village—foundling—God knows what. It’s a cruel life, boy!”

“What is cruel?”

“This—this life I’ve set ye to. Maybe if I’d been a carpenter—and could make me own cases, bedad—I’d have made ye a carpenter or a joiner, but I only knew this—a bit of this thing, Phil. It was all I could teach you, avick! They say it will kill you. God forgive them! They don’t know it was just the bit I had to hand—a sort of widdy’s mite, as the saying might be.”

“Doctor Dick——”

“No boy!—Don’t—don’t touch me! You’ll go—you’ll go all right. It’s just the best thing for you. Do ye remember the nights we’ve spent together? There’s a comforting maxim in the books—the sound of it, I mean, not the sense—*damnum sine injuriâ esse potest*. It’s a case in point, with plenty of *damnum*—blessed word—but the *injuria*, my boy, is a kind the law takes no account of. Do ye mind the old woman and that blessed word Mesopotamia? It’s the like with me—trying, Phil, to find comfort—in—in words. But, laddie, what—Damn it,

sir! you're snivelling. Here, help me on with my coat. Now, open the door and let me go home. May the saints preserve you from home in a hash-house, Phil. Strike a light, do you say? If you do I'll kill you—kill you dead."

And that night Doctor Dick happened on an old crony, and the bell was touched past all counting.

The father slept on his idea. It was just such an idea as would evolve itself from his simple brain. He had resolved to see Temple, and plead with him—about what, he knew not, only that there was a suffering soul that was dear to him, and the source of that suffering must be with Temple.

Beneath the genial bonhomie of his reverence lay a sensitive nature that felt more keenly than the world ever knew the little thrusts and buffets that life deals out to all of us; and it required all his courage to face what he felt must be the reception of his interference in a matter which had no personal concern to him. He had no diplomacy but that of the heart—and that is outside the schools. He winced as he thought of the highly probable cold stare at his audacity, the curt words of his dismissal; but he thought again of the woman, fading into premature age, and, as he divined it must be, stretched on the rack of suffering by the hand of the man to whom he would appeal. After all, what was a snub less or more in a lifetime? If a man feared these little weapons, he might as well lay down his arms at once, and accept defeat before the fight was fought.

He sent a note to Temple, asking for an interview at his home, and received a courteous reply inviting him to dinner.

Dinner seemed a gleam of hope. Much that might fail before the best of meals could be accomplished after it. "There's saving grace in a good dinner," said Dermot to himself.

His host, who had met him several times on visits to the station, received him cordially. They were alone; and the gloom of the room since the day when Temple had first dined there without his wife was, for the time being, lifted by the cheery presence of the old priest. No trouble could entirely exclude the sunshine from his nature.

It was a good plain meal, well served, and accompanied by the best bottle of claret Dermot had drunk for many a day. Temple, though puzzled at the request for an interview, made no reference to it, but waited till his guest should do so, and this Dermot kept postponing from hour to hour. He had a great budget of quaint anecdote to draw from, and over his pipe, which he had resorted to after a couple of cigars that served as a stimulant to smoke, he kept Temple interested and amused. At last he gave an apprehensive look at the clock. It marked eleven. The limit of hospitality could not be extended much further. He felt an unpleasant twinge at the thought of bracing himself for the duty before him.

"I must be going," he said feebly, as an introduction to the assault. "Er—I—in fact, before I go, there is a matter I wanted to speak to you about."

"The whiskey is with you, father; let me give you some more soda."

Dermot was thankful for the respite whilst Temple unwired the soda.

"Now fill your pipe again, and let me hear what is the trouble. Some of the flock in the meshes of the law, eh?"

Dermot started to fill his pipe, but put it down, and with a great throb in his heart waded into the middle of things.

"Yes, it's one of the flock, and yet not one of the flock. Years ago, Mr. Temple, there was a child who came very

close to the heart of a childless old priest—and maybe that's a bull. Well, she grew to womanhood, and married. She is unhappy, poor soul—unhappy. This intrusive, impertinent old fool—the priest, I mean—shoving his nose in where of course it had no right to be, where he was not asked, where he had no shadow of right to urge for his interference, said in the folly of his heart, 'I'll go to the only one who can set it all right, and ask him'—bedad! it's hard to say what he would ask him, only to say that she is suffering, that she is dying, killing the soul in her, for something that perhaps you may set right."

Temple's face hardened.

"You are not quite explicit, Father Sheldon; but from what I glean it appears that you assume some right of interference in my domestic affairs. Is that part of your priestly office? You forget, perhaps—I am not one of the flock."

Dermot took the thrust. He had counted on it, and it had come sure enough.

"I am not speaking as a priest, Mr. Temple. I have no claim, no right to do so to you. If you knew what it has cost me to come to you—the pride every man has is not easily put aside, sir."

"Do I understand that you spoke of my wife?"

"Yes."

"Has she sent you to me?"

"She neither sent me, nor does she know that I am in Sydney."

"Have you been acting the part of father confessor to her?"

"Mr. Temple, don't make this thing harder for me than I can bear. Even a priest—and an old man at that—has his bit of pride."

"The question of my endurance you did not apparently contemplate. You have not answered my question."

"No, not a word, not a sign. I know nothing, I asked nothing. Only I could not help seeing—who could help it?—that she is suffering—suffering hell, sir!"

The unconventional use of the word carried with it to Temple perhaps a clearer ring of the truth than if some more studied word had fallen from the old man's lips.

"Then I am to regard you as a sort of Don Quixote of the bush, eh? The Don in a cassock for coat of mail!"

"You may regard me as you like, sir," said Dermot, with rising wrath.

"Do you conduct all the domestic readjustments of the flock after this manner?"

"Mr. Temple, I am your guest, and I wish to God I had never taken bit or sup with you, for your hospitality, sir, makes it impossible for me to say what I would if we stood on equal ground."

"Do not let a leg of mutton and a bottle of claret stand between you and the fine freedom of your Hibernian independence. If it would gratify you to, let us say, 'call me names'—that is an elementary phrase—why, don't scruple to do so! I think I remember sitting at your table on one occasion. The restraint of hospitality you may set aside."

"Begad! I will then! Whatever it is between you and your wife, you are a damned coward to kill her inch by inch as you are doing. A paltry, beggarly coward, sir! Why, there's not an out-at-elbow, tater-an'-point rapsallion in old Ireland would treat a woman as you are doing—and you a gentleman, begad! a gentleman!"

Temple rose, unruffled, self-possessed. He looked at the clock and shrugged his shoulders.

"It is getting late, Father Sheldon."

"Good-night, sir." Sheldon bowed coldly. "I have to thank you for your hospitality."

"The obligation is mine, for the pleasure of your company."

Temple opened the door, and proffered his assistance in putting on his guest's overcoat. But the father would have no assistance.

When he got outside, and was on the footpath, he pegged cityward with the energy of youth. A couple of miles worked the fire out of the old man's veins, and he then turned upon himself with vehement abuse.

"And you a priest—God help ye for a broken vessel! That's a nice sort of diplomatic way ye have with ye—ye old fool! And once ye had thoughts of being a Jesuit! You! Now what have ye done with your wild devil of a temper? Made matters worse a hundredfold. Troth, and there's truth in the old saying, 'There's no fool like an old fool!'"

But Dermot's diplomacy, had he only known it, won its way home better than all polished phrases and appeals to sentiment.

Temple thought it over when he turned back to the room. How miserably lonely the place was! However, it was up for sale, and he would no longer be haunted by the past that was recalled at every hour, every minute of his life in it. After all, was it true? Was he what the old priest had said? But then Sheldon did not know—well, at least in that she was loyal. And he said that she was dying by inches! He remembered her in that room, not long after their marriage. She had bent over him as he worked—late into the night—at that very table, and he had repulsed her. It must have been lonely, in those early married days, for a girl taken directly from the warmth and cheer of her home. How could she understand the jealous resentment of a self-contained nature such as his, at the intrusion of another—even though she were wife—into his

life? He had offered her admission into it, not wholly realising what it meant; and when she came to him, he found the chill isolation of self grown too strong a habit to be changed at will. The change had come at last; reluctantly, slowly, too late to avert catastrophe. The presence he had once resented touching his life at every point, he had grown to welcome. The merely social tie had become another, a closer tie. And the boy! What hopes, what schemes he had built on him—believing him to be his son! Poor little chap! it would be hard on him. And then he thought of the mother's misery—the sin that she could not expiate herself, to be visited on the sinless child; the haunting horror of the father's end; his sacrifice, his lonely, awful death—and a growing compassion for the woman filled his heart. For the first time the possibility of forgiveness was suggested. Life could never be the same to either of them; but he need not leave her to bear the shame and agony alone.

The misery of it! and as Temple's imagination pictured the torture of mind she must endure, there came the first spark of love, rekindled by the breath of pity, for the woman he had driven from his home.

CHAPTER XXXVI

"MARY!"

"Yes, Sheila!"

"We have always been like sisters, have we not?"

"Yes, dear; why do you ask me in that way?"

For answer, she laid her hand affectionately on Mary's shoulder as she sat on the verandah chair, listlessly looking out at the falling rain.

This was the season when clouds drenched the parched earth with their welcome rains, filling the dried-up creeks, and swelling the river from bank to bank.

"Do you not know, Mary?"

"Yes, perhaps I do."

"It is not difficult to guess. Mary, it is hurting the old folk dreadfully. They know—we all know—how could it be otherwise?—that there is some trouble between you and John. Your illness, the change in you. There have been no letters—no home letters for you. Your expectation, your disappointment, the dejection creeping over you day by day, the long solitary rides you take—even Wilf seems to be dropping out of your life as, seemingly, we all have dropped out of it—even father and mother. We have never said a word to you about it, dear, but we cannot help seeing. Couldn't you tell mother? It is breaking her old heart. You are her only girl, Mary, and you do not know—you surely cannot know—the love she bears you, or I think you would tell her everything."

"Mother! Mother!" she moaned, burying her face in her hands. "If only I could tell her—but I can't, Sheila; it is no use, I can't! It is between John and me."

"Yes, we know it must be. But surely, there is no trouble between man and wife that cannot be mended? You need not be afraid that mother would interfere in any way; only she might comfort and advise you. She is getting very old now, Mary; and when life is nearly ended for one, the little troubles that vex us all, and sometimes drive us apart, get into true perspective—when one can look back only. So much in this world, dear, that we worry about doesn't matter after all. And who could understand and sympathise as she could—she who knows the beginnings of your life, its better things and worse. Silent grieving is not natural to us women. I never heard of a Stoic woman," she said with an odd little smile, "and I would not believe there was one, even if I read it in a book. Only this morning, dear, I found her in her room, crying to herself. You do not know what a shock it was. I never remember her doing anything but cheering us up, helping us, and showing us the bright side of things. Why, half the sunshine in our lives has been brought to us by mother. She would not tell me what it was, but I know—you know, Mary. Couldn't you go to her, dear, and tell her everything?"

Innocent, well-meaning Sheila! If she could have known the pain she inflicted with every word!

"I can't, Sheila, I can't! It is between John and me. I could not tell even mother."

Sheila looked at her a little coldly—even a little suspiciously. What could it be? She persisted no longer. It was evidently hopeless. A busy housewife, she had a score of duties to attend to—and sometimes she thought that if Mary would only shake off the morbid listlessness that was closing on her life, and set about doing things, she would be the better for it. In her heart she had always felt somewhat afraid of Temple. He was

very clever, no doubt, and all that, but so might Eric have been if he had not been so easy-going; but these very clever men must be difficult to live with. One doesn't want to be set right fifty times a day; and probably very clever men did that sort of thing—in a superior, gentlemanly way, of course; not like entertaining a school-master unawares, perhaps, but still it must be a bit hard on a woman. Now, Eric! well, he wasn't like that. Eric—but then Vaughan represented the beginning and the end of all mankind to his wife.

To Mary that morning had been an especially bitter one. The hope that Father Dermot had inspired in her, by the rose-coloured atmosphere in which he moved and had his being, and into which he lifted those who came within his influence, had been dissipated by the tardy arrival of the mail, whose delivery had been delayed by the rains. There was no letter for her.

She found his name in the newspaper law reports. That was the nearest link there was between her and his world.

The paper lay in her lap as she looked from the verandah at the soaked garden with its dripping leaves. A lead-coloured day, as lead-coloured as her own unhappy life, with its spectral face of the dead, and faces scarce less spectral of the living. She tried to turn her thoughts aside from their persistent channel by reading the news in the three-days-old Sydney journals. Her eyes glanced down the columns indifferently. What were the world's doings to her, with this secret gnawing at her heart, and the dead face of Jim, the living one of her husband, staring at her from every page?

She was going mad. She could not bear it much longer—not much longer. Night was dreadful, day scarcely less so. If she could only get some surcease, some long, dreamless rest, she might recover and even live wrapped

up in the life of the child ; but her brain seemed incapable of doing aught else but drag her back 'to the dead and her husband. If only she could go to mother, and tell her everything, and trust to her love that she would not put her away as disloyal and impure ! But then it was John's secret, John's shame. She dare not speak.

Her eyes wandered idly to the pages of the newspaper, and they were caught and held there with concentrated interest by an advertisement. It was the usual sort of puffing announcement of an "Important unreserved sale by auction," of the household furniture of John Temple, Esquire. There were the usual "superb drawing-room suite, charming cabinets, and beautiful upright grand, all in perfect taste and modern design." She saw the name only—the catalogue had no interest to her. It was the fact, the bare fact, the selling of the home. It put the whole matter in a nutshell. This was the end of it all, staring her full in the face. She was homeless, an outcast wife with an outcast child. She dreaded any one coming, for she had not the strength to rise, and the thing was staring out of the paper for the whole world to see. Fortunately, no one came near her and she had time to recover self-possession. She tore off the page containing the advertisement, and, folding it, put it in her pocket, to destroy it later on. It would give her at least a little respite, and time to face it, before they knew, as they must know later.

The rain had ceased falling, and the sun was striving to force its rays through the clouds and mist. She could not stay in the house. Going to her bedroom, she changed her dress for a habit, and putting on her straw hat with its gossamer veil, went down to the stables. Every morning her horse, Sam, was brought up from the paddock to be in readiness for her. She saddled him with the practised

hand that had not lost its cunning in the years. Then she led him to the stump near by, and mounted. As she rode across the paddock to the slip-rails she heard the voices of the children at their play. They were down by the stock-yard. She cooeed. They answered, and came running across to her, racing each other to see who would be first to let the rail down. Wilf had a good start, and with flushed face and panting breath came first to the slip-panel, losing his cap on the way.

Mary looked down on the rosy face with its bright, eager eyes, and the head with its thatch of crisply curled hair, and for the moment love and pride shut out all else from her heart.

"Take me, mother?"

"Not to-day, Wilf. Perhaps another day."

"It's been 'perhaps another day' for ever so long now," he pleaded. "Do, mother! Just this once, there's a dear!" and he came to her side.

"Not to-day, dear. Mother wants to think." Then on the impulse of the moment she added, "Tell them at home not to wait dinner for me. I may go down to the flat and have dinner with Uncle George."

He looked disappointed, but made no further appeal. There seemed to be some intuitive sympathy between them.

"When is dad coming, mother?" he said suddenly. "We've waited a long time for him now. He must be very busy, mustn't he?"

"Very, dear. Could you climb up and give me a kiss?"

He laughed at the implied doubt, and climbed up the post, from which he could reach her.

He was very fond of his beautiful mother, and she some times called him her little lover—he paid her such quaint homage in his childish way. Sitting on the top of the

pos he could get his arms round her neck as she leant over, and he kissed her on the lips and the cheek.

"I do wish dad would come soon, mother. We're getting just a little bit lonely, aren't we?" he said, looking her in the face wistfully.

"Yes, Wilf." She could say no more.

Then he clambered down the post, and trotted with the other youngsters by her side to let down another set of panels. There she left them, and Wilf, as she rode away, saw a smile on mother's face, and smiled back to her and nodded his little head vigorously, and waved his hand till she had passed from his sight.

Since her return to the station she had not visited the flat. Twice her brother George had come up from his bachelor retreat to see her. There was, however, little in common between them. George was never so much at home as in his own company, and that of the miscellaneous literature he had gathered about him. His mother sighed over him, referring to him as "poor George." His disinclination to marry and his self-contentment were elements of character which, from her point of view, made for unhappiness. As a matter of fact he was far from being the unhappy man she, in her motherly solicitude, imagined. He looked out on the world through other people's spectacles, and was so well content with them that any inclination he had ever had to don a pair of his own had pretty well departed. To get back to the comfortable hut after a long day in the saddle, and settle down with his pipe and a book—the other man's spectacles—represented the best in life to philosopher George.

She had avoided the flat, despite her brother's repeated invitations, lest the visit should recall with renewed vividness the night that had led Jim to the scaffold and made her an outcast.

To-day, however, she felt drawn back to the place by an impulse she was too reckless to combat. The cup of her misery was filled to the brim. It could not matter. What could matter now ?

She let the horse follow the winding track down the hillside in and out among the gums and saplings, till they reached the river. It was swollen with recent rains, and Sam was up to the girth in the middle of the fording-place. However, they crossed safely with only the penalty of a wet hem to her skirt. It was just such a morning that she had last crossed the river. How much had happened since then !

The hut had been patched with some fresh sheets of bark ; otherwise there was no change in it. George was away ; and save for a dog, who at first resented her intrusion, but in the end permitted himself to be conciliated, the place was deserted. It was an odd chance that her brother would return. He might not come home till the evening. She would get some tea, and go on up the flat along the riverside track. It would be like retracing the steps of her life. Ah ! if she could only retrace them in very truth !

She left a scribbled note for her brother on the table. As it happened, he had started early that morning to go to Glenfyne, where a new family were now established, and he would not return till late the following day.

Up at the homestead they were surprised that afternoon by Wilf rushing into the house all afire with excitement.

" Guess, grannie, guess ! "

" Guess what, dear ? "

" The jolliest thing you can think of, grannie. Aunt Sheila, you guess ! "

" What is it, laddie ? Guess what ? "

" Who's come ? "

"What, really?"

"Yes, really, really! Won't mother be 'lighted?"

"Is it really John?" said grannie, turning for confirmation to Sheila.

"Yes! Here he is coming through the garden gate."

"Thank God!" murmured grannie, furtively wiping her eyes with the corner of her big white apron.

Temple had procured a horse at Fassifern and ridden up that morning. He counted every mile as so much of the burden of life cast to the wind. After all, they were very dear to him, these two. When it had come to the final pinch, John Temple sacrificed his pride, and, cancelling the projected sale of his house, set out to bring them home again. "There is something in the forgiveness of trespasses after all," he thought, as he neared the end of his journey. "Perhaps it's only a subtle form of self-approval; perhaps it is a gleam of something better, but it spells the happier life, whatever it is or whence it comes. Who am I that I should measure out her punishment to the bitter end? 'Even God forgives sometimes.'" He recalled her pleading words. "Despite it all, I love her; and if I can't forget, then, God help me! I'll try to forgive!"

And it was to forgive that he had come.

When he learned that she was not in the house, the elation he had felt died down, and the sombre fear that had played its part in impelling him to the course he had taken, again possessed him. It so unsettled him that he would not wait longer than was sufficient to partake of the meal placed before him. Then he re-saddled his horse, and set out for the flat. In the hut he found the pencilled note to George lying exposed on the table. It simply stated that she was going along the river-track, and would return for tea. He looked at his watch; it was now five o'clock. The grey light of the cloud-covered sky would

not last for more than a couple of hours. She must be returning. He would go and meet her, and there—alone together—they would be reconciled, and set their faces towards the new life before them.

He was weary after the long journey, and let his horse jog along the track at his own pace, expecting at every bend of the river to see ahead of him the returning figure of his wife. Tired of body as he was, and with mind filled with the meeting that was drawing nearer and nearer, he yet noted the familiar spots along the way. After the rainfall, the pungent, aromatic scent of the eucalyptus filled the air. He heard the thump! thump! of a wallaby in the patch of peppermint-scrub, and saw its grey-brown body rising and falling as it made for the rocky upland. They must meet soon. The evening began to close down. At every twist in the track he said to himself, "Now!"

Then he cantered on whilst the light lasted, with a watchful eye for overhanging branches. He grew anxious—thinking of the lonely woman riding with only her sad thoughts for company in that depressing hour of the day, when the dense scrub put on its garment of mystery, and played fantastic tricks with the imagination.

As it grew darker, he had to walk the horse again. His nerves got on edge; his mind was filled with undefined forebodings—the anticipation of something—he knew not what.

The moon would not rise till late—worse luck!

With an exclamation half of alarm, half of enquiry, he suddenly pulled up his horse. In the rapidly falling darkness he had stumbled on something, and his horse reared back and swerved aside. He peered through the haze. It was a horse.

Good God! her horse! It must be! The side-saddle was twisted round, though the girth still held. He got

down and caught the dangling bridle. There was no difficulty in doing it; the animal was evidently in pain. From the feeble effort it made to avoid him he conjectured that a limb was injured. He struck a match. The saddle was dripping with water; there was a deep cut on the unfortunate brute's off-shoulder, and the leg was torn as if by rock or snag. He let him go, and Sam stumbled with convulsive efforts into the scrub. He heard him fall, and with desperate effort and short, fear-filled squeals try unavailingly to rise. His own horse he tied up a short way off, trusting he would not break away, and then returned to the track.

He ran along it with feverish haste, every now and then stooping to see if there were newly-made hoof-marks on the damp soil.

Hitherto the track had kept well back from the river, beyond flood-mark; but now it dipped down to the crossing-place that led to the rising ground on the opposite bank.

He knew it was the road to the Falls where they had picnicked one day. At the crossing he saw some light-coloured object caught on a bush. It was a woman's veil. The river was up with the recent rains, and the current carried with it the flotsam and jetsam that had cumbered its course during the dry season—withered branches, and now and then a dead tree with its roots upturned. Surely she had not been mad enough to cross at this pent-in, narrow ford, safe only when the river was diminished to a creek!

In the rush of the water, and the crashing of the timber as it came lumbering down, tearing its way through the submerged snags, it was impossible to hear any human cry for assistance.

The only thing he could do was to search along the

bank. He ploughed knee-deep into the rotten, oozy scrub, and forced a way. It would of course be useless trying up-stream. If she had met with an accident, she must be down-stream, and probably on this bank, against which the water swirled by the trunk of a fallen tree, too massive to be shifted unless in full flood ; and, fresh as the river was, it had not yet reached that stage.

So with fierce determination he tore a way through the matted scrub, sinking at times almost to his thighs in the mud and decayed vegetation, his face and hands lacerated by the thorns of the creepers and the needle points of the deadwood.

He kept as close to the river as he dare. His eyes staring into the darkness caught the faint gleam of the waters eddying round the limbs of dead trees that stuck up like the arms of some despairing victim being done to death.

In the fork of one of these derelict gums he saw a white patch that was more than foam. He cried out in a voice that tried to pierce through the roar of the river.

“ Mary ! Mary ! ”

He waited for an answer, but heard only the rush and din of the water.

Creeping out along the trunk, whose roots were partly buried in the shallow waters of the bank, he reached the white patch. Inch by inch, twisting his arms and legs round the rough, noduled tree, he came to it—he had reached her at last !

She had been so caught that the upper part of her body was thrown against the trunk, the lower part supported by an underlying limb.

There was no time for grief or fear. Every effort was bent on getting her back to the bank. He could not lift her. The only thing to do was to drag the body with him.

He grasped her arm, and moving on a foot or two, drew it near the bank. A few more yards and they would be safe. As they were in reach of the bank, a log came bearing down. It was on them before he could get her clear, and hitting the trunk end-on, swung round on her.

He cried out wildly, inarticulately, as it struck her on the back and squeezed her body in against the trunk. With the strength of despair he drew her up, and dragged her into the shallow water. There he carried her to the bank, seemingly dead, and sat beside her, dazed and weak, fighting back the exhaustion that threatened to overcome him. When he had recovered sufficiently to rise, he set to work to make a passage through the scrub to the firmer ground higher up. Fortunately the belt thinned out a little at this point, and at length he forced a path through it. Then he lifted the limp, draggled thing in his arms and bore it to the open space beyond the river.

There he propped his back against a swamp-oak, and held her in his arms—the woman who had wronged him—the woman whom he had loved and had forgiven.

For a long space—it seemed to him in the eternity of that night like a lifetime—she lay inert in his arms. Once or twice he detected a slight movement in the body gathered so close to him. It would come and go, like the feeble flutter of a bird in its death-agony. So he had noted when out shooting, the bird lying on the ground in apparent death would make a tremulous movement of the body, as though the inert life gave one final protest against extinction.

Her head was resting on his shoulder, the cold face nestled against his neck. He felt the faint coming and going of her breath, so he thought, but perhaps it was only the intensity of his hope that deluded him. If only he could say "I forgive," that she might die at peace with

him! If only he could say "I love!" that she might die as one with him, not forsaken, not forgotten!

From the lips so close to his there came a feeble moan, quivering, full of mortal pain. It ceased, and came again.

"Mary, can you hear me? I forgive; I love you!"

He felt the wounded body respond to him, move feebly as if it would come closer to him, and then fail.

"John, dear! Husband!" The words came in a faint whisper, but the eager ear caught the sound of it, and he kissed the cold cheek.

He thought of leaving her there, and returning for help; but she seemed so close to death he dare not. It became very cold as the night wore on. He had wrapped his coat about her, but it was of little use over her wet clothing.

The agony of that night was never blotted from his life. It seemed to him, looking back at it in after days, that the wild things in the bush, knowing how she loved it and them, wailed a dirge for her. From the further side of the river, where lay wild and almost inaccessible country, came the intermittent howling of the dingoes, rising and falling in long-drawn wails, and answered from afar. Nearer at hand the curlew keened. Around them were mysterious noises, the crackling of dry branches, the stealthy movements of life rustling among the tussocks of tall grass. There were the "girr" of the 'possum, the "pitch" of the wild cat. The whole bush was filled with the coming and going of unseen things. It was a relief to him to look up through the branches at the sky, now clear of the sullen clouds. They had drifted away at the rising of the moon. He watched it rise higher and higher till it silhouetted the twisted limbs of the dead gums into a distorted resemblance to human skeletons.

The sky itself was crusted with myriads of stars, and the powdered "Milky Way" broken with black, cavernous spaces.

It is a little world we live in with all its joys and pains—
an infinitely little world !

At daybreak the birds awoke, and filled the scrub with their music. The "maggies" sang their morning song ; the kookaburras broke into quaint peals of laughter. The eastern sky flushed with colour that paled into the clear light of day.

Through all the long night and into the last day of their married life she lay in his arms, murmuring from time to time some simple word of endearment as she drifted to death, there, as she would have had it, in God's open country ; leaving this little island of His Universe, with life unfulfilled, love just renewed, her mother-care all incomplete.

The lower part of her body was paralysed, and death crept upward slowly, leaving her conscious, and with a mind still capable of receiving impressions. She even noted how sweet and fresh the scents of the bush were after the rains, and smiled gratefully when Temple plucked some peppermint leaves, and put them near her face. Was there anything in the world sweeter than gum leaves ? And the birds in the scrub ! How often, lying in her bed in the old home, she had been awakened by their chorus ! She wondered if it would be the same with Wilf ; would the bush be in his blood as it was in hers ? Surely he must have sucked it in at her breast ! It was good to love the bush and scrub ; no soul could be stained quite through and through that loved the wild things, and the hills and gullies where they hid.

The uplifted bloodless face, with emotion breaking across it in transient ripples, told its tale to Temple. Life was shifting its panorama of the years before her eyes, till the roll would run out and the blank space come.

The morning wore on. She asked the time. He told her ten o'clock.

She looked up at him half wistfully, half pitifully, and said, in a whisper, "The Court sits, John." Then she was silent for a space. Afterwards he caught broken sentences as if her mind were wandering; she muttered odd childish phrases as she had heard them from the boy's lips.

She moved her face closer to him, tired and seeking rest. It was cold with the upcoming death of the body.

"John, it is our secret. Ours and his; he died to keep it and atone."

"Ours alone."

"Wilf will never know?"

"He is my son."

She thanked him with her eyes, her lips, her dying breath—then passed to take her trial at the Great Assize.

CHAPTER XXXVII

THE parson stood at the entrance to the little cemetery at Fassifern, waiting the coming of the funeral procession. He had received a wire from Temple the previous day, and taking the night train had reached his destination the following afternoon.

The coffin, placed in a spring cart, and sheltered from the sun and dust by branches of young, thick-leaved foliage, was followed by a long string of horsemen.

Temple and Vaughan rode at either side of the vehicle.

The parson met them at the gate. The men dismounted, and hung the bridles of their horses on the post-and-rail fence that enclosed the burial-ground.

Then the coffin was lifted from the cart and borne to the grave-side. It was the next grave to the one in which the parson had laid his own dead to rest. For the first time since the morning he had gone out of the condemned cell, he repeated the solemn words of the Service for the Dead.

When the grave had been filled, the men mounted their horses and turned homeward, leaving Temple, Vaughan, and the parson together. A minute later they followed. There was nothing more to do.

At the homestead an old, grey-haired woman had locked herself in her room with the contents of the camphor box—the familiar, brass-bound, sweet-smelling box where the moth never ravaged—the box that held in it the worthless and yet most precious gleanings of the wife's and mother's hands. There lay her own bridal veil, and the waistcoat of white brocaded silk that "father" had worn on his

wedding-day; some broken toys, a little, quaint set of children's tea-things sprigged with pink flowers; some baby clothing, a child's dress of white merino—the party dress—a bundle of faded letters. Mother's wealth, spread out before her and the God who gives—and takes.

Vaughan left Temple and the parson to themselves and silence. It was broken only by some formal, commonplace enquiries. The thoughts of each were elsewhere. An hour might have passed when Temple said abruptly—

“I would like to ask you a question, Fennel—if there is any reason why you should not answer—well, that will be enough. You were with that man—Blake—before his execution. At the trial I had reason—I mean there was a doubt in my mind—that the name he gave—Blake—was not his own. Do you know the truth?”

He looked at him, and noted a slight contraction of the muscles of the mouth, no more.

“Yes, I know the truth.”

“May I know it?”

“You may. I knew the man years ago. His name was Blake. He confessed the murder, and, as you know, died for it.”

And he turned and looked Temple squarely in the face; and as he looked, he saw, or thought he saw, some subtle change in it; the keen eyes softened, and filled with an almost womanly tenderness.

“That is all. Thank you, Fennel, for the assurance.”

Then silence was resumed; but Temple said to himself, with the glow of a nearer friendship at his heart, “The Reverend Luke Fennel, by the grace of God—a liar and a gentleman!”

Wilf, as he stood by his father's side on the deck of the outward-bound liner, was a picture of bright, healthful boy-

hood. Sheila's motherly heart had softened the early grief for the loss of his own beloved mother ; but the loyalty of his young heart was undimmed. He had lifted her up to a place of worship, and never a day of his life passed—then nor in the after years—that did not bring to him the picture of her face, beautiful, serene. As she had hoped, the love of the bush and its living things blended into and became an integral part of his life. Though he went across the sea and among strangers, he would surely return, drawn back by the irresistible influence of the home of his mother and his youth.

As the Heads were passed and the vessel turned southward, Temple's thoughts went back to a quiet spot at the foot of the ranges. The last time he had seen it the wild sarsaparilla, the "sweet tea" of the early settlers, with its dark green leaves and purple clusters of blossom, had spread a coverlet over it, and twined its tendrils round the square-cut cross at its head—and so he thought she would have had it, could she have made answer out of the world of shadow.

Wilf was very quiet, standing by his side as he leant on the bulwarks, looking at the vanishing land.

"'Good-bye' is coming early into your life, laddie, eh?" he said kindly, putting his hand on the boy's shoulder, "to mother, then to home."

He felt a little quiver at the word "mother," and drew him closer. They would give her their last thought, as the land faded from view.

After dinner, the coast lost to sight, they sat on deck ; and Temple cheered up the youngster with visions of the future. He told him of the glories of the great public schools of England, the traditions of greatness, manliness, duty, associated with their names. Then he spoke of the later life of the 'Varsity—his own Oxford.

The moonlight, spreading its path across the sea, brought by association Arnold's exquisite picture before his eyes—"Steeped in sentiment as she lies, spreading her gardens to the moonlight, and whispering from her towers the lost enchantments of the Middle Age. . . . Adorable dreamer, whose heart has been so romantic! who hast given thyself so prodigally, given thyself to sides and to heroes not mine, only never to the Philistines! home of lost causes, and forsaken beliefs, and unpopular names, and impossible loyalties!"

He took the boy's hand in his own and bent over him.

"You will come back some day, laddie, never fear! come back eagerly, hopefully, but with a new light in your eyes, and an added love in your heart; not as the Philistine, ashamed of his own, but loving your own the more through the love you bear the mother of our race."



THE END

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